

# Mike Horse Messenger

## Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex Public Comment Period Extended

The Helena National Forest and Montana Department of Environmental Quality have extended the public comment period for the alternatives considered in the *Repository Siting Study for the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex* to December 9, 2011.

Copies of both the *Executive Summary* and the entire *Repository Siting Study for the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex* can be obtained at: [www.deq.mt.gov](http://www.deq.mt.gov), [www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/), the Lincoln Ranger District Office at 1569 Highway 200, Lincoln Library at 102 9<sup>th</sup> Street in Lincoln, Lewis and Clark Library at 120 South Last Chance Gulch in Helena, Helena National Forest Office at 2880 Skyway Drive in Helena, and the Montana DEQ office at 1100 North Last Chance Gulch in Helena.

**All comments must be received no later than Friday, December 9, 2011.**

Comments can be mailed to: Helena National Forest, ATTN: Kathy Bushnell, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59602; or emailed, with "Mike Horse" in the subject line, to [comments-northern-helena@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-helena@fs.fed.us).

### CONTACT

Beth Ihle or Shellie Haaland if you or your organization would like to schedule a presentation about or a field trip to the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex.

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## Site Update

November 2011

### Recent Developments

#### Water Treatment Plant

To meet water quality standards, Asarco constructed the water treatment plant (WTP) at the UBMC to treat contaminated water. The WTP began operations in 2009. Within a short period of time, most metals met final permit discharge limits for water quality; however, in order to meet the final permit discharge limits for all metals, the WTP needed some upgrades.

As part of the bankruptcy settlement agreement, Asarco transferred the WTP and responsibility for its operation and maintenance to the Montana Environmental Trust Group (METG). METG is responsible for conducting construction and operational modifications to the WTP. During the spring and early summer of 2011, METG upgraded the WTP to meet the final discharge limits. Meeting final discharge limits protects fish and aquatic life, as well as human health.

In July 2011, METG started using potassium permanganate to assist with meeting the WTP final discharge limits. This winter METG will continue to optimize the chemical processes at the WTP to more efficiently meet the final limits. METG will add more mixing tanks and fine tune the operational processes to efficiently manage the chemical usage and sludge production at the WTP.

This fall, METG re-built one of the storage ponds adjacent to the WTP. The liner in storage pond, known as Cell 5, was replaced because the original liner was damaged during Asarco's construction of the WTP. In addition to replacing the liner, Cell 5 storage capacity was increased. Cell 5 is used to store water under emergency conditions, such as WTP upsets, until it can be treated.

#### Agency Coordination

**The DEQ, DOJ/NRDP and USFS are coordinating the remediation and restoration of the Mike Horse Dam and UBMC.**



Construction begins at location of new drain system



Materials being screened to ascertain suitable, non-leaking core for dam

**For more information:**

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**To be added to the mailing list:**

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Or visit the website at  
<http://deq.mt.gov/StateSuperfund/UBMC/default.mcpx> or virtual  
tour at  
[www.deq.mt.gov](http://www.deq.mt.gov)

## Blackfoot River Valley & Construction Update

### Mike Horse Dam 2011 Spring Flood Management Activities

The Blackfoot River Valley received tremendous runoff during spring 2011 and most of the Blackfoot River flooded.

DEQ and USFS pumped groundwater and surface runoff from April to June in an effort to divert the water around the impounded tailings in the Beartrap Creek diversion ditch. While the capacity of this ditch is 50 million gallons, the Mike Horse Dam, which holds the impoundment back, was not constructed to retain water. At 22 million gallons, the toe of the Beartrap Creek diversion ditch would have been saturated, which would have increased the risk of all the surface water flowing into the impoundment. Over the course of the spring, 49 million gallons were pumped. Had the agencies and their consultants not planned and implemented contingency measures for last spring's runoff, this year had the potential to create another catastrophic event very similar to the 1975 dam breach.

The cost of this flood control was over \$350,000. That cost, combined with the amount of time needed to make a decision on a repository location, resulted in the agencies installing a gravity drain system in October to pipe groundwater through the impoundment and the dam. Additionally, a large drop culvert was installed, in case of future heavy runoff prior to the removal of the dam.

While this is not a permanent solution to protect the Blackfoot River, this option is more cost efficient and lower maintenance than pumping ground and surface water. It is a temporary measure to reduce the risk of dam failure while the repository location decision is being made and the construction process takes place.



*New drain pipe arriving at site*



DEQ has launched its new UBMC Virtual Tour at <http://deq.mt.gov/statesuperfund/ubmc/virtour/default.mcpx>. You can also access it from the DEQ homepage at [www.deq.mt.gov](http://www.deq.mt.gov) or from the UBMC homepage.

The Virtual Tour walks you through layered maps to review historic UBMC features such as the Mike Horse Town Site and the Old Mike Horse Mine. It also shows current features such as the dam and WTP. You can still visit our established UBMC webpage at <http://deq.mt.gov/StateSuperfund/UBMC/>



*New drainage pipes being laid*