

Mike Horse Messenger

Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex



Site Update

October 2017

Mike Horse History

Mining of the Mike Horse Mine began in **1898** and expanded into a larger operation in **1919**. In **1938**, the Mike Horse Mining and Milling Company leased the mine and built a 150 ton-per-day flotation mill. In **1941**, the Mike Horse Dam was built across Beartrap Creek to contain flotation mill tailings.

In **1975**, heavy rains caused a partial failure of the dam and high creek waters eroded contaminated tailings into Beartrap Creek and the Upper Blackfoot.

In **2005**, a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Dam Safety Report found the dam unsafe, and recommended it be removed from service. In July **2007**, USFS released an action memorandum calling for the removal and disposal of the dam, mine tailings and wastes. In April **2008**, state and federal officials announced \$39 million in funding from the ASARCO LLC bankruptcy settlement to remove the aging Mike Horse Dam and the contaminated tailings behind it, and to clean up and restore portions of the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex.

An agreement with DEQ, the Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP), and the USFS was soon reached to coordinate cleanup at the site, with DEQ serving as lead agency.

Source: NRDP dojmt.gov/

Agencies fine tuning final work phase

This issue of the Mike Horse Messenger looks ahead to what's next in the cleanup plan at the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex. However, we're also looking back, to bring the community up to speed on the developments of the past few months.

Firstly, we apologize for the delay in updated information as we fine-tune the final phase of work with our project partners.

Last spring, DEQ made the decision to pause work on the project in order to reevaluate the draft bid package for the final phase of work. We recognize that the pause was unexpected and dis-

appointing for those who were looking forward to seeing the haul work wrapped up next year.

Why did work stop?

While pausing work was a difficult decision, it was made in the best interest of the cleanup and its long-term success. Those who have closely followed the project are aware that several unpredictable factors have influenced the project budget and timeline since work began in 2008:

- The Mike Horse access road was dangerous for site workers and deliveries to the site. Therefore, another road had to be

built. The new route, Meadow Creek Road, was constructed in 2010.

- During the 2011 spring runoff, there was a heavy snow-pack, reminiscent of 1975, and concern of another tailings impoundment blowout. Water was pumped and mitigations taken to avoid a dam failure.
- Paymaster Gulch, the originally selected repository site, was shown to be inadequate, requiring a new repository site to be found. Costs included a study of the

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Public Presentation to the Lincoln Community Council

Tuesday, Oct. 17, 6:30 PM
Lincoln Library, 102 9th St., Lincoln, MT

Officials with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality will give updates on the Upper Black Mining Complex cleanup project followed by a question-and-answer session.

DEQ will make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who wish to participate in the meeting. If you require an accommodation, please contact Karen Ogden at (406) 444-6360 or karen.ogden@mt.gov

(... Spring 2018 continued)

new site, real estate, design, and development.

- The original estimated waste volume for the entire site in the Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis was 500,000 cubic yards. To date, more than 600,000 cubic yards has been removed, with an estimated total of 1 million cubic yards to be removed by the end of the project.

From the outset, the cleanup project's guiding documents acknowledged that there were uncertainties about the exact nature of the site and the contamination. Now, as we move into the final phase of work – with three years of excavation at the site under our collective belts – the project partners have an opportunity to pause and make sure that we're using our past experiences to guide future work. This is especially important as we approach the final project phase, at which point there is less ability to absorb unforeseen costs.

The project partners are taking a hard look at the project's draft bid package for the final phase for areas where we can accomplish the required work with less cost. In other words, we want to get the best bang for our buck – or in this case, for our reclamation dollar.

Is there enough money? Is there a plan going forward?

As the final work plan is determined, there is uncertainty about whether the remaining funds will be adequate. Prior to resuming construction, we're working with our project partners to reach an agreed-upon strategy to maximize the remaining funding from the ASARCO bankruptcy settlement. The plan will need to incorporate careful planning and sequencing of the work for maximum efficiency.

Through close cooperation with our project partners, examining cost savings options and design considerations, we're working to ensure that we can successfully complete the final phase of work.

We're aiming to wrap up the final bid package this winter and resume construction in spring 2018. The goal is to finish most work by the end of the 2019 season, with minor wrap-up extending into 2020. As always, plans could be delayed by fire, weather or other unforeseen circumstances at the site.

Looking ahead

The staff and leadership at each of our agencies – DEQ, the Natural Resource Damage Program, and the U.S. Forest Service – are grateful for the input, cooperation and patience we've had from the Lincoln community over the past six years. As we finish up the project, we'll work to manage the negative impacts, such as haul traffic and road closures, as much as possible. We'll also work hard to keep the community well-informed. Watch for another project newsletter this spring, as well as a pre-construction community meeting.

What's Next?

We care about keeping the community informed. DEQ will hold a public meeting and will publish a new issue of the Mike Horse Messenger in Spring 2018.

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On the web: <http://deq.mt.gov/Land/statesuperfund/ubmc>

Measuring Progress

- More than 600,000 cubic yards of tailings have been hauled to the UBMC repository.
- The tailings impoundment has been completely removed (2015).
- Approximately 3,000 feet of Mike Horse Creek and 2,100 feet of Beartrap Creek have been rebuilt. Both creeks are running in the valley bottom for the first time in decades.
- Infrastructure at the water treatment plant has been upgraded and replaced.