

GOO gone

Lincoln and Potomac students see the final day of Mike Horse Dam

Story/photos by Roger Dey
BVD Editor

School kids from Lincoln and Potomac stood on the Mike Horse access road overlooking the old dam and impoundment site Oct. 14, and watched as excavators worked to remove the last of the blue, clay-like mill tailings that once filled the narrow Bear Trap drainage.

"You guys are seeing the very, very last part of the dam being taken out of here," said Shellie Haaland. Haaland, the

Montana Department of Environmental Quality construction manager for the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex reclamation project, told the students the last of impoundment material, dubbed "blue goo," was expected to be removed by the end of that day.

The removal of the dam and 45-foot deep, 2700-foot long impoundment behind it began last summer. By Oct. 14, DEQ contractor Helena Sand and Gravel had moved 380,000 cubic yards of contaminate material to the UBMC repository near Highway 279.

To illustrate how rapidly they moved the material, Haaland had the students time a large excavator filling one of the side-dump haul trucks. One timer pegged it at 58 seconds.

Haaland told the kids that, as worked progressed to remove the dam this year, they found out how saturated the material actually was.

"The sand that got put on top of it kept all of its water. None of it could drain out," she said. "The



Bethany and Maggie from Potomac finish off their mud pie with their initials.

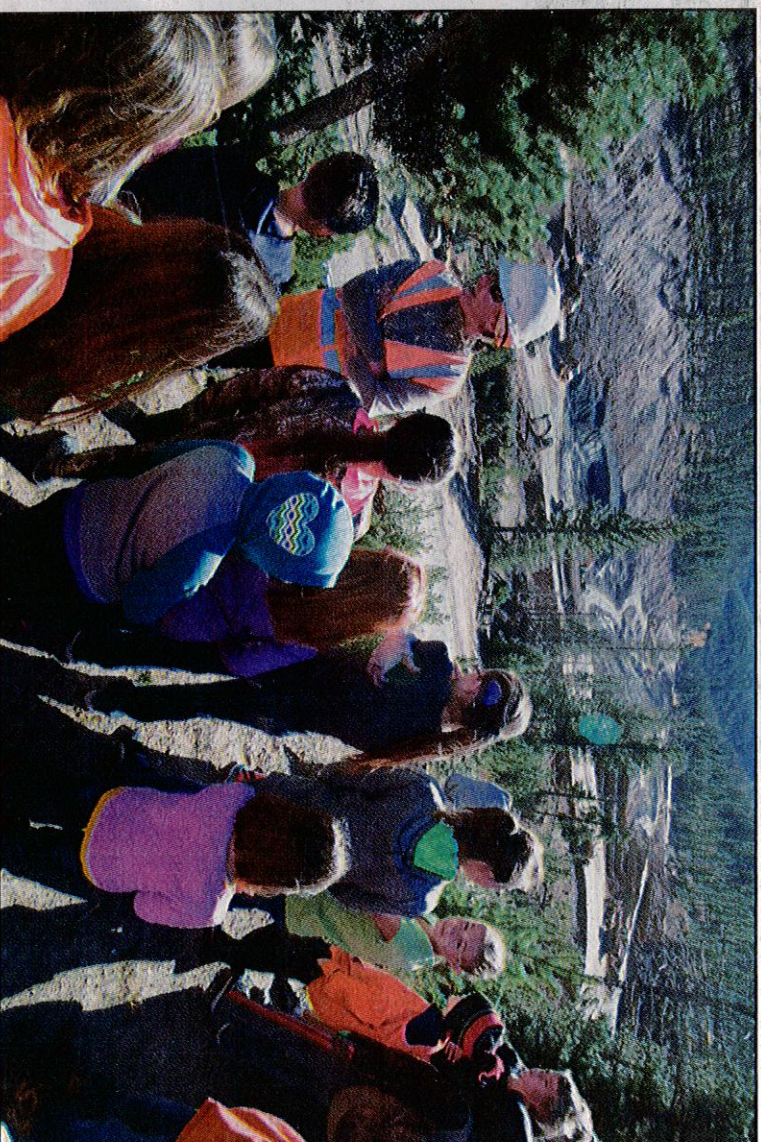
last of the gray stuff you see out there was so wet and so saturated that if you stood on it and stomped you feet, you would sink down and water would squirt up next to you."

She said the almost jelly-like consistency of the material meant the dam had been very susceptible to a seismic event.

Above the excavations, a crew from Streamworks in Lincoln was at work creating new stream bed that was beginning to snake down the valley.

"When we're done taking everything out of there, we're going to put the water back in the new creek bed. And when the water goes back in the new creek, it'll go all the way down to here," Haaland said. "Then it will have to be put back into a pipe. The reason for that is all the rest of this is contaminated and next year we'll go down the valley and take out all of those tailings."

Most of the kids were familiar with the project and had visited to the site before. Last year at about this time the



School kids from Lincoln and Potomac gather around Shellie Haaland on the road overlooking remains of the Mike Horse Dam and impoundment during an Oct. 14 field trip.

Lincoln students stood atop the now-missing Mike Horse Dam and looked downstream at the confluence of the Bear Trap and Mike Horse Creeks, 65 feet below them. Two years ago, Potomac students saw the site before any reclamation work had begun.

"It looks a skosh bit different now," Haaland said after her talk with the kids.

School's POUNCE program director, said it was nice to learn firsthand what was going on at the site, and to hear the plans for finishing the project up. She was also amazed at how different the area looked. "We used to drive up there before this was beginning. I was up there two years ago. I wouldn't even recognize it to be same area," she said.

After visiting the impoundment site, the students headed to the

UBMC repository and got a hands on lesson in its design, which Haaland explains in terms of mud pies. Donning protective blue gloves, the kids got to dig into buckets of the different types of material coming out of the Mike Horse area and make mud pies. It was a hands on lesson in the different consistencies of the material, and in how firmly the "blue goo" could be packed down.

For most students, that was a highlight of the trip. "I like it when we get to do this and make mud pies," said Connor, as student from Potomac who was on his first field trip to the area.

Haaland said she enjoys the school visits "They ask awesome questions and they pick it up really quickly."

Nevertheless, she missed the members of Lincoln's 7th grade class, who visited last

year as sixth graders. If any of the 7th graders want to come out, all they have to do is call me. I'll figure out a way."

After the visit, the kids were treated to ice cream cones provided by Valler's Creamery and Mercantile in Lincoln.

Helena Sand and Gravel Superintendent Eddie Roatch, took a turn at a different kind of excavation, digging into a vat of hard ice cream and scooping cones for the students. He thought seeing the kids up there was great. "It's a chance for them to see what we're doing," he said. "Hopefully they remember it when they get older."

Haaland said that's one of their goals. "I think this is the kind of thing kids generally do remember. That's why we do it, so it becomes part of their history. Who we're doing it for is the next generation."



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