

EPA plan will be cut back

Proposal already trimmed by \$300 million as liner for South Fork is removed

Posted: Wednesday, March 2, 2011 12:00 am | Updated: 10:30 am, Wed Mar 2, 2011.

By ALECIA WARREN/Staff writer |

It will be smaller. It will be less expensive.

But it probably still won't satisfy everyone.

In the midst of reviewing and responding to the 6,000 comments submitted on the proposed Upper Basin Cleanup Plan, the Environmental Protection Agency is already axing at least \$300 million from the initial \$1.3 billion pricetag.

Millions more could still be trimmed.

"We're not able to come back and say, 'We heard people and we're going to go away and not do the cleanup,'" said Bill Adams, EPA project manager. "We're working through them (comments) and looking at what changes we could make."

The federal agency has been delving into the mountain of e-mails and letters since late last year, Adams said. The EPA is compiling them into a database with intent to respond to each individually, and then release a cumulative response for public viewing.

"As you can imagine, that's a fairly lengthy process to go through," Adams said.

There's a clear trend in opinions about the \$1.3 billion proposal, Adams said, which includes cleanup of 300 sites and is projected to take up to 90 years to implement.

"The general themes (in comments) are that it's too long a period of time to do a cleanup, it's too expensive, that's it's not necessary," Adams said. "A lot of folks believe the risks aren't real, that enough work has been done already."

Unfortunately, congressional mandate requires the EPA to continue the mining waste cleanup to meet water quality standards, Adams said.

But the agency still wants to meet the public halfway.

A subcommittee of the Basin Environmental Improvement Project Committee has been charged with combing the plan to determine which projects to table or trash altogether.

"There are a number of ways to package (the implementation), in addition to reducing the overall scope," Adams said.

The subcommittee, the Upper Basin Project Focus Team, is comprised of state and federal agency representatives, environmental experts and spokespeople for the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Adams said.

Focus team member Bill Rust, also a consultant for Shoshone County, said the group has found plenty in the plan that can go.

Like projects that have already been done, he said.

"The EPA, when they did this (plan), they didn't look at what they had been doing for the last 10 years," Rust said. "It was all based on a feasibility study done in 1998. So we took a look at all kinds of work that had already been done."

That included cleanup on a large swath of individual yards, the Old Sunshine Tailing impoundment and Pine Creek.

The subcommittee also tallied about 10 sites in the Silver Valley that are still actively managed, Rust added, which are ineligible for Superfund, or CERCLA, efforts.

"CERCLA is supposed to clean up abandoned things," Rust said.

Removing the completed and ineligible projects would save about \$200 million, Rust estimated.

The subcommittee also agreed to drop \$325 million worth of lining planned for the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River, he added.

"There were all kinds of questions about that and comments. Technically there were all kinds of problems with it," Rust said.

If EPA approves all the cuts - the agency has already greenlighted axing the \$325 million liner - that will slash \$500 million from the cleanup plan, Rust said.

"Plus that would reduce the time frame," Rust added. "Instead of a 90-year (timeline), maybe we're at a 40 year."

Other items still remain to be discussed, he added.

Terry Harwood, executive director of the Coeur d'Alene Basin Commission, said the subcommittee has gotten input from engineers and scientists and is making careful decisions.

"The activities of that Upper Basin Project Focus Team are really important now, because they're putting together the final list of stuff to be included in the ROD amendment," he said.

Meanwhile, Harwood is still nailing down which sites will be included in the plan's remedy protection projects, he said, which will prevent previously cleaned sites from being recontaminated.

Those projects are expected to cost roughly \$30 million, Harwood said.

"That whole list hasn't been developed yet," Harwood said. "There's a bunch of stuff going on before we have a final list of work."

The Upper Basin of the Coeur d'Alene River is part of the Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Complex Superfund Site.

The basin is contaminated with waste from a century of mining operations in the Silver Valley. Despite cleanup efforts over the past 20 years, the area still contains concentrations of lead, zinc, cadmium and arsenic.

The EPA has \$500 million to spend on the cleanup from the Asarco bankruptcy proceedings completed in 2009, which can only be used for environmental cleanup in the basin.

Adams believes that the EPA will have the final cleanup plan in an ROD amendment around September this year.

Harwood isn't expecting the final document to win endless praise.

"It's not going to please everybody," he said. "But it will be a better product when we get done."

More about **Cleanup**

- **ARTICLE:** Zanetti Bros. reaches deal with United States Department of Justice
- **ARTICLE:** Coeur d'Alene Chamber of Commerce opposes EPA plan
- **ARTICLE:** Officials hype alternate EPA plan
- **ARTICLE:** Otter letter critical of EPA

More about **Epa**

- **ARTICLE:** North Idaho's link to the governor
- **ARTICLE:** Movers and Shakers February 11, 2011
- **ARTICLE:** Progress remains hazy
- **ARTICLE:** U.S. says too much fluoride causing splotchy teeth

More about **Adams**

- **ARTICLE:** Coeur d'Alene's Rosenthal verbals to Saint Mary's
- **ARTICLE:** Coeur d'Alene Tractor Company founder passes away
- **ARTICLE:** Ugly Fish coming to Riverstone
- **ARTICLE:** The Front Row with Jim Litke January 11, 2011

© Copyright 2011, **Coeur d'Alene Press, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho**. Powered by **Blox CMS** from **TownNews.com**.