



Colorado Department
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JOINING TOGETHER FOR NORTH CLEAR CREEK

Partnership seeks to improve highways, waterways & wildlife

GILPIN COUNTY – An innovative project through North Clear Creek Canyon has brought together several diverse organizations, working in partnership, to improve the State Highway (SH) 119 corridor between U.S. 6 and Black Hawk.

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Silver Dollar Metropolitan District (SDMD), along with a number of other agencies, have combined resources to mitigate mining impacts under Superfund*, and to improve fish and wildlife habitat and transportation safety along the corridor. Because some of the projects, especially mine cleanup, are administered by other state or federal agencies, CDOT formed the North Clear Creek Mitigation Advisory Committee or NCCMAC, allowing various entities to share information and coordinate information gathering.

“NCCMAC has allowed us to develop new relationships with a number of different agencies and ultimately, that will enhance the environment along Highway 119,” said CDOT Resident Engineer Russel Cox. “By working together, not only will we be saving money for the taxpayers, we’ll be improving the quality of life through North Clear Creek Canyon.”

Project coordination through NCCMAC provides cost savings in several ways:

- Information sharing among the agencies and their consultants prevents duplication of effort on concurrent projects
- Coordinating project timing saves material costs when, for example, rock generated from CDOT projects along SH 119 is used by the CDPHE/EPA for covering exposed mine tailings and erosion protection
- Combining projects, such as mine cleanup and highway construction, saves money and can result in more thorough creek restoration, while projects conducted separately are not as cost effective

The EPA and CDPHE also are working on two projects to clean up polluted mine drainage from the Gregory Incline and National Tunnel near Black Hawk, with work on the National Tunnel being coordinated with CDOT’s Main Street South, a project that begins later this year to widen SH 119 from two to four lanes, one mile south from Black Hawk.

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“EPA views this coordination as a great opportunity,” said EPA Regional Project Manager Mike Holmes, “not just to mitigate mine wastes in the Clear Creek watershed as part of Superfund cleanup, but also to improve the aquatic life and wildlife habitat in North Clear Creek.”

Another highway project that falls under NCCMAC coordination is a curve straightening of SH 119, one mile north of U.S. 6. It is scheduled to begin this spring and continue through the summer. To enhance the environment of North Clear Creek Canyon, some of the plants removed as part of this project will be transplanted to areas around the Black Hawk/Central City Wastewater Treatment Plant, while others will be transplanted to locations elsewhere in the canyon. This will keep the plants acclimated to the area’s tough growing conditions.

“I am enthusiastic about CDOT’s collaboration with CDPHE and EPA to efficiently coordinate our respective projects,” said CDPHE Project Manager Ronald Abel. “This creative approach has great potential to improve the environmental condition of North Clear Creek.”

Due to historic mining impacts dating to the latter half of the 19th century, North Clear Creek currently cannot sustain fish and has very poor riparian habitat. One of the ultimate goals of NCCMAC is to bring North Clear Creek, between Black Hawk and Clear Creek, to the point of supporting brown trout again.

The project initially began as a joint effort between CDOT and SDMD. “We realized early on that this was a great opportunity to expand the scope and deal with a wide range of other problems,” said Medill Barnes, SDMD manager. “It has become, I think, a model of interagency and industry cooperation, which is not only addressing several major environmental concerns, but is certain to save money as well.”

In addition to CDOT, CDPHE, EPA and SDMD, several other agencies are involved with NCCMAC, including the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Colorado School of Mines, University of Colorado, City of Black Hawk, Black Hawk/Central City Sanitation District and Gilpin County.

Additional information about the SH 119 corridor is available at <http://www.dot.state.co.us/GamingEIS>

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**Superfund is an EPA program that cleans up abandoned waste sites. The Clear Creek/Central City Superfund site addresses historic mining in Gilpin and Clear Creek counties. Mining-related heavy metals impair Clear Creek and North Clear Creek, affecting fish and other aquatic life, but not human health.*