

Canyon Creek Brownfields Assessment Focuses on Camp Bird Mine 14-Level



1903 CAMP BIRD MINE MANAGER'S RESIDENCE NEEDS PRESERVATION

TLR's **2005 Annual Report** includes the story of how TLR conceived of an innovative approach to analyze mining impacts to Ouray County's Canyon Creek watershed, an area of visually stunning high country basins between the City of Ouray and the Town of Telluride. In 2006, the Canyon Creek Brownfields Assessment focused on two blocks of claims: the Upper Thistledown Mine (owned by Ouray County), and Camp Bird 14-Level (owned by Federal Resources Inc. of Salt Lake City). Our deepest thanks and appreciation go to both owners for their willing consent and cooperation to perform Phase II Environmental Assessment of their private properties.

The goal of the Phase II assessments was to determine environmental impacts that the properties may be contributing to, what the remedy to those impacts might be, and what the remedy would cost if it were to be undertaken, so that conservation interests would be able to devise strategies to cooperate with the landowners to bring their properties into some sort of cooperative, open space conservation protection.

The Canyon Creek Brownfields Assessment will conclude by June 30, 2007. Results and Final Report will be available for public viewing at the County Commissioners Offices at the Ouray County Courthouse, in Ouray.

The history of the Camp Bird Mine reads much like a classic textbook story from Colorado's rich mining history. Legend has it that surveyor Tom Walsh, after witnessing the devastating bust in mining prices that followed the great silver crash of 1893, wandered up to some abandoned silver workings in upper Imogene Basin, where he found gold-bearing telluride ore in a waste rock pile, mistakenly ignored by the now-gone silver miners. Walsh staked claim, and in 1896 began to develop new tunnels at 2-level and 3-level, below the original discovery. By 1898, 3-Level in Imogene Basin, included a three-story boarding house, workshops, and warehouses.

Tom Walsh sold the mine in 1902. His daughter, Evalyn, went on to become a famous Washington DC socialite, and owner of the Hope Diamond for nearly 40 years until her death in 1941[1].

At its peak, between 1902 and 1910, the Camp Bird was the second largest gold producer in the United States. A new mill was constructed at the confluence of Imogene and Sneffles Creek (the present day site of 14-level) in 1902, with a tram carrying ore from the portal at 3-level to the new mill. The still-existing residences were built opposite the new mill in 1903, as the site became a bustling company town. The new mill itself was rebuilt and expanded after an avalanche and fire destroyed the original mill structure in 1906[2]. The new, 14-Level portal and tunnel was built

in 1916 to intercept the workings above.

The next 60 years saw the Camp Bird Mine open and close numerous times. In the late 1950's, the mine underwent extensive rehabilitation, exploration and development. In 1960, the old 1906 mill was torn down and replaced by a new 500-ton-per day mill. In 1963, Federal Resources Corporation, operating under their subsidiary, Camp Bird Colorado, acquired it, and operated (or leased it for operation) periodically until 1986[3].

According to Mindat.org, the Camp Bird “operated 1896 to 1990. Main ore body is the Camp Bird vein, with replacement ore bodies on three other veins. Produced about 1.5 million Troy ounces of gold to 1990. Also produced 4 million Troy ounces of silver”[4].

Federal Resources is the current owner/operator of the Camp Bird Mine. They have an approved reclamation plan on file with the Colorado Division of Minerals and Geology for 14-level[5], but as of the end of 2006 had made only partial progress toward completing the approved plan.

As will be discussed in the Phase II EA Report and in TLR's Project Final Report, 14-level presents a variety of environmental concerns and accompanying liability questions that complicate any potential public acquisition or alternative protection scenario.

[1] *Evalyn's Heart of Gold*, from *The Hope Diamond*. PBS website: http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/hope/hlevel_1/h6_heart.html

[2] George E. Moore, *Mines, Mountain Roads and Rocks*. Ouray County Historical Society, 2004, p.81.

[3] *Ibid*, p 83.

[4] *Mindat.org: Camp Bird Mine, Ouray, Sneffels District (Mount Sneffels District), Ouray Co., Colorado, USA* <http://www.mindat.org/loc-8702.html>

[5] Bob Oswald, Colorado Division of Minerals and Geology, Durango Office. Personal Communication.