Watershed group poised for mine cleanup

Hefty grant backs coalition’s efforts to aid Uncompahgre

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Heavy metals, invasive species, trace elements — and, of course, drought — exact a heavy toll on local waterways.

But the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership is here to help and recently obtained substantial grant funding for work related to protecting the Uncompahgre River.

Additionally, the partnership has been recognized as a nonprofit organization in the state, is well on its way to achieving tax-exempt status and has broadened its board to increase diversity.

“Our major goals are to improve water quality and quantity in the Uncompahgre River,” said Emily Galanto, interim coordinator for the coalition.

Other goals include outreach, education and addressing river function through such actions as re-vegetating the banks to prevent erosion.

“The Uncompahgre is a prime example of being affected by acid mine drainage. Starting next year, we’re doing a mine cleanup project,” Galanto said.

River water flows through areas where there are old, legacy mines, picking up heavy metals as it does so, and the water turns acidic — even red, if it picks up iron oxide. Some parts of the river have significant levels of heavy metal.

In 2014, the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership will launch clean-up ef-