

# 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 main 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-

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orts in Ouray County at the Vernon Mine, the Michael Breen Mine and the Atlas Mill.

"Those were chosen based on water sampling efforts by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Division of Mining, Reclamation and Safety. We found these sites are major contributors to heavy metal," Galanto said.

Ultimately, the cleanup will divert water from mine tailings. The tailings are to be covered and re-vegetated.

"It won't completely eradicate the heavy metals, but it will reduce it," Galanto said.

The project is at least a three- to five-year process, and is funded by a Nonpoint Source 319 grant, which requires matching funds. The Division of Mining, Reclamation and Safety usually contracts the projects, but the watershed coalition lines up partnerships for the projects.

### New board for watershed partnership

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership recently gained six new board members and four new officers.

The new board president is Ken Lipton, a rancher who is also a Ouray County planning commissioner, president of the Shavano Conservation District and a member of the Ouray County Agricultural Review Board.

Jack Flowers, also a rancher, is vice president. He is also a member of Tri-County Water's board.

Scott Williams is the new treasurer. He is also treasurer for the Ridgway-Ouray Community Council and president of the Pleasant Valley Vista Homeowners Association.

Judi Chamberlin, a physician, has been named the new secretary.

Other board members are Ben Tisdell, Anthony Ramsey, Dennis Murphy, Jerry Roberts and Bob Larson.

To volunteer, or for more information, visit [www.uncompahgrewatershed.org](http://www.uncompahgrewatershed.org).

— From the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership's news release.

The watershed group is working with several other organizations and entities, including the U.S. Forest Service and mining companies, as well as other nonprofits.

"We are also calling on volunteers and local contractors," Galanto said. "... It's going to take a lot of volunteers, and

we're going to be a huge part in that."

Trace elements such as selenium also threaten the Uncompahgre's water quality. The element occurs naturally in the region's Mancos shale, but when water hits that soil, the selenium is leached into the groundwater and the river,

where it can harm fish and waterfowl.

Montrose County has a selenium management plan in place, the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association has been lining its lateral canals and the Gunnison Basin Selenium Task Force has been spearheading reduction efforts for years.

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership utilizes the AmeriCorps Vista program, and this year, its Vista volunteer is also working with the selenium task force.

The partnership is also sensitive to water needs, Galanto said.

"The drought is awful right now. We're working toward developing a strategy and working with landowners, but we also realize water is a touchy subject," she said.

"We think about everything we do and base it off the needs of our community. When we talk about a watershed, it's not just the water. Our watershed encompasses so much space and so many uses."