

# OURAY COUNTY Plaindealer

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## OURAY COUNTY

# Projects use creative techniques to mitigate mine pollution

BY TORI SHEETS  
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Sneffels Creek will run more clearly after completion of a bank stabilization project designed to divert the creek away from mine tailings at the abandoned Atlas Mill. The mill is just east of the Ouray Silver Mine, formerly the Revenue Mine, and its tailings are laden with cadmium and zinc deposits that leak into Sneffels Creek.

The creek is on the Clean Water Act's 303(d) List of Impaired Waters because its water quality does not support certain aquatic life. Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership coordinated a project to divert the creek away from the tailings so it won't continue to flow through the area and pick up the heavy metals.

**MINE P11**



Tailings from the Atlas Mill were seeping into Sneffels Creek prior to the bank stabilization project. Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership collaborated with Ouray Silver Mines and Western Stream Works to turn the creek away from the mine tailings and reduce the amount of heavy metals in the water.

Plaindealer photo by Tori Sheets

# High alpine tundra remains undefined

BY DALTON CARVER  
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The Ouray County Planning Commission had one last chance on July 6 to review its draft of high alpine residential development regulations before its public hearing July 19. The final recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners will be voted on after the hearing.

Meeting at the Land Use building in Ridgway, the OCPC went over the draft subsection by subsection, reviewed the accompanying report to the BOCC and then laid ground rules for the upcoming public hearing.

The attending public also had 15 minutes to voice their opinions as the process came at an end.

### Square footage

During the section walkthrough, the most complicated issue seemed to be how much square footage of a structure to allow on buildable high alpine parcels, which must be at least five acres. At previous sessions, the OCPC decided on a maximum density of one 1,000 square foot dwelling with a 200 square foot non-dwelling accessory unit.

A high alpine developer can also earn an additional 500 square feet for each "surrendered" developable parcel, maxing out at 2500 square feet. "Surrendered" would mean the owner

gives up development rights for those properties. This would encourage one larger structure rather than several smaller ones, thereby lowering density.

The element in question Wednesday evening was whether surrendered parcels could be touching or non-contiguous above 9,480 feet, where the High Alpine Zone begins.

"We need to pick one of these and then perhaps offer the other concept to the BOCC in the report (for consideration)," said Randy Parker, OCPC chair.

The majority of the commission wanted a contiguous connection between potentially surrendered parcels in order to earn the additional square footage.

"Contiguous would definitely be a more difficult standard," said Craig Jackman, planning commissioner.

Chris Carr, planning commissioner, shared his opinion on the possible maximum square footage of 2500.

"If we're going to offer 'allowances,' I'd like to see (maximum square footage) reduced," he said. "To me, we're just piling on something we're trying to discourage."

However, Parker and the rest of the commission decided to accept the figure.

"It's going to be on significant acreage if they're going to get up to 2500 (square feet)," said Parker. "It's

**HIGH P7**

# Public hearing continues for CR 1 PID

BY TORI SHEETS  
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The public hearing regarding formation of a public improvement district to levy taxes for chip sealing the unpaved portion of County Road 1 did not culminate in a decision by the Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday.

The public comment period was continued to July 26 at 6 p.m. in the 4-H Event Center. Commissioners noted several citizens with an interest in the issue could not fit Tuesday's morning meeting time into their schedules.

The only decision before the BOCC now is whether commissioners should form the PID, place the question on the general election ballot or not allow formation of the PID at all. If commissioners decide to form the PID they

will also set its boundaries.

If the district is formed, voters within the district would decide the debt and mill levy issues later.

Citizens expressed opinions both for and against formation of the PID during the public hearing, but comments were overwhelmingly against forming the district.

County Attorney Marti Whitmore said she has a personal financial interest in the issue because she owns property in the proposed PID, so she removed herself from the BOCC table and joined the public.

Paul Sunderland, San Juan County attorney, is assisting the BOCC with all legal matters on the issue. Commissioners set aside \$5,000 for Sunderland to assist them in any mat-

**CR 1 P6**



The 4-H Event Center was packed on Tuesday as citizens of Log Hill Mesa came out to express their opinions about the formation of a public improvement district to pave CR 1.

Plaindealer photo by Tori Sheets

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## OURAY COUNTY

# Grinding to a start

BY TORI SHEETS  
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During a field tour of the Sneffels Creek Bank Stabilization project on Thursday, tour-goers got an exclusive look at the inner workings of the mill at the Ouray Silver Mine, formerly the Revenue Mine.

OSM is in a feasibility study phase. The study is to determine whether operators can tell the mine owners to go forward with investment.

"The numbers are attractive enough that I think we'll be doing that," Clint Fletcher, chief executive officer of Ouray Silver Mines, Inc., said.

Lascaux Resource Capital, based in New York, is the investment management service for the mine. Fletcher said they already have a capital budget developed, and after the feasibility study is completed it will take a month or two to complete negotiations.

"If we move forward we'll be looking at about another \$30 to \$35 million into this project, and looking at a re-start on this mine about this time next year," he said.

Target production for the mine is 250 tons of silver a day.

The mill at OSM processes all the raw

materials taken from the mine. The mill will operate around the clock to separate silver, zinc and gold from the ore.

Brian Briggs, chief operating officer of OSM, explained the mill operates through a process called attrition grinding.

"That mill is loaded to 35 percent with iron balls of different sizes and the ore is between them," Briggs said. "It lifts up on the side to a 45 degree angle and they roll and tumble down over the ore. The ore is completely embedded and mixed all through them."

The ore is then reduced to a fine sand-like product laden with minerals. The product goes into a flotation circuit where chemicals are added to modify the PH as well as create a froth to attract silver and gold and make the zinc sink.

This mineral slurry is then agitated to create more bubbles to trap the silver and gold.

The bubbles are separated and the waste goes to the bottom. The waste then goes through a cleaning process to remove zinc and the remaining silver and gold.

The slurry goes through a press cycle where high pressure plates squeeze out water, and filters trap the particles. The



The owners of Ouray Silver Mine gave the tour-goers an exclusive look at the inside workings of the mill. Target production for the mine when it is open will be 250 tons a day.

Plaindealer  
photo by  
Tori Sheets

final product is a black, fine, shiny sand-like product. The silver product is bagged and is ready for shipment.

Fletcher said when OSM is up and running, one goal he has for the mine is to produce little to no waste. The mine tailings have about 95 percent of the lead, zinc and silver removed in the milling process. Fletcher said the tailings are very benign. Right now all the waste rock coming out of the mine is taken by Ouray County Road and Bridge Department to use as road base on county roads.

"The idea here at this mine site is to have no waste generation," Fletcher said. "That's going to be tough. I don't think we can get rid of all our tailings to use as road base, but we'll be able to get

rid of a good portion of it and really be able to reduce our footprint on this mine site."

The only other mine in the world to have no waste footprint is the Sutter Gold Mine in California. Fletcher said he has visited the Sutter Gold Mine many times and decided to take a page out of their book and reduce waste production at OSM as much as possible.

"We said hey, what's a way we can have a mine that the only thing we have for waste is some scrap steel, scrap wood and regular old office waste products," he said. "That's it, that's all we should have, everything else gets used and sold."

OSM is going through environmental testing to apply for a permit to do so.

## MINE cleanup

### FROM P1

Western Stream Works manager Bill Coughlin is conducting work on the creek bank stabilization project. His plan is to change the meander of the creek along the portion where the water meets the mine tailings. He is using boulders, trees and other materials from the site to divert the stream and create floodplains for future expansion of the creek.

"What we're trying to do is let the

river create a sinuous, natural pattern through the floodplains," Coughlin said.

He said the creek will ultimately decide where it wants to flow, but through diversion techniques he hopes to guide the creek in a way that won't require future mitigation.

"Our whole objective is to walk away without maintenance and for it to look like we were never here; that's the best compliment we can get," he said.

Before the creek was diverted, an island with willow trees was in the cen-

ter of the flow. Coughlin removed these trees and replanted them on the bank of the stream to create additional bank stabilization.

Ouray Silver Mines is collaborating on the project because the mine tailings are on their property. Clint Fletcher, chief executive officer of Ouray Silver Mines, Inc., said the last thing he wants is a repeat of the massive spill at the Gold King Mine.

"We don't want to be sitting here 20, 30, 50 years from now continuing to

have a discharge out of that portal," he said. "We're certainly not going to plug the portal because we all know what happens when you plug a portal, it just comes out somewhere else."

Fletcher is also working on a treatment system for discharge water coming out of the Atlas Mill. The system channels water out of the mill into holding ponds where a "bioreactor cell" will clean the water. The cell has a limestone bed with a layer of peat moss and geo fabric on top. The next layer is a foot of topsoil with cattails and other carbon inducing plants. All of this creates a carbon-rich environment for microorganisms to live and help filter out the heavy metals.

"So the whole idea is you create an environment where bugs will live," Fletcher said. "The peat moss and carbon is there for food, and they create their own chelating system and they grab extra metals that are coming up."

After the water goes through the system it meets water quality standards. He said he put a number of these bioreactor systems in the Leadville mining district and they worked great.

Ouray Silver Mine has received permits for this system and will begin the process in the next few weeks.

The creek bank stabilization project is being funded by a grant through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment - Nonpoint Source Program, as well as a cash match from Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety.



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## MUSEUMS



### Ouray Alchemist & Pharmacy Museum

533 Main Street • Ouray  
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Step back in time with a museum tour! Much of the collection has been acquired over the last 40 years from local sources including the historic mining towns of the San Juan mountains. Owner and collector Curtis Haggard personally brings history to life through fascinating true stories as he conducts the tour. In addition, our large gift store features art, antiques, jewelry, collectibles, cards and over-the-counter drugstore items. Check out all our 5-star reviews on Trip Advisor!



### Ouray County Historical Museum

ouraycountyhistoricalsociety.org  
420 6th Avenue, Ouray • (970) 325-4576  
Hours: M-Sat 10am-4:30pm; Sun 12-4:30pm

In the original Ouray Miner's Hospital built in 1887. More than 40 exhibits and 30 rooms including: World class mineral and gem collection; Simulated underground mine; Mining era hospital suite and operating room; Ranch history room; Vintage quilts; Military/Veteran's room; Native American room; Narrow gauge railroad history. Ouray's connection to the famous Hope Diamond - learn the story! Don't forget to ask about our special events, historic tours and "Evenings of History" Series.