

River Watch Items for the May 2026 UWP WHWG Meeting

- River Watch items of interest May 2026
 - May 2026 sampling will extend through the 14th or 15th. Eight sites were sampled as of May 7th; all six lower sites plus Gray Copper Gulch and Red Mtn Creek at Crystal Res. We will check access to the two highest sites on US550 and the Camp Bird Rd sites during the week of May 10th.
 - Our RiverCorps member, Elliot Risch, began streamflow measurements on April 20th on Dallas Creek and the Hyde-Sneva ditch. To date he has sampled Dallas Cr and the ditch twice, Cow Creek once, the Unc at Ridgway once, Gray Copper Gulch twice, and Red Mtn Cr at Crystal Reservoir twice.
 - I responded to the River Watch survey regarding future charges for more than two sampling sites. This two site minimum did not apply to UWP and Ouray which have had six or more sites for many years. I indicated that UWP would be willing to pay for three year-round sites. In our case that would be six of the half year TMDL sites. The price has not been determined but it is expected to be \$150 to \$300 for a year-round site. For the coming River Watch year beginning July 1st, 2026, I do not plan to drop any of our current 15 sites, allowing at least one more year of data for the Uncompahgre Basin TMDL.
- Precipitation and Streamflow:
 - Table 1 shows Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) data for the Gunnison Basin and two SNOTEL sites in the Uncompahgre Watershed through May 8th, 2026, and Figure 1 shows the history of SWE at the Red Mtn Pass SNOTEL site for the 2026 Water Year. Due to a colder April and a few storms in April and early May the SWE curve at Red Mtn Pass held relatively steady and intersected the minimum SWE curve on May 2nd. This lifted the SWE depth to the 2nd percentile at Red Mtn Pass, and the same thing occurred for the Gunnison Basin. Although snowmelt and runoff were delayed by the storms and lower

Table 1. Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) data for the Gunnison Basin and the Idarado SNOTEL and the Red Mountain SNOTEL as of May 8th, 2026.

Date	Gunnison SWE 15 site avg (in)	Gunnison % of Median	Percentile Ranking	Idarado SWE (in)	Idarado % of Median	Percentile Ranking	Red Mtn SWE (in)	Red Mtn % of Median	Percentile Ranking
11/12/25	0.3	16		0.0	0		0.7	25	
11/24/25	1.3	50		1.0	48		1.7	39	
12/08/25	2.8	72		2.2	69		3.8	63	
01/09/26	4.6	65		3.6	64		5.5	53	
02/06/26	5.4	56	4	4.5	55	7	6.7	48	2
03/08/26	8.5	64	4	6.8	61	0	10.2	57	2
04/09/26	2.7	17	0	0.0	0	0	6.0	25	0
05/08/26	1.8	18	2	0.0	0		4.9	22.7	2

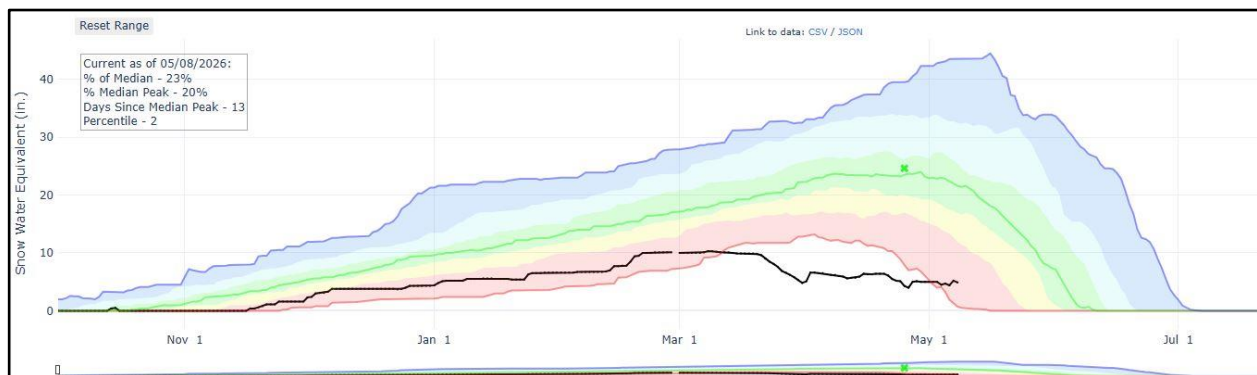


Figure 1. Water year histories of SWE at the Red Mtn Pass SNOTEL site. Black line is WY2026, green line is SWE median and the red line is the minimum curve. Green "x" is the median peak in SWE (24.6 in on April 26th). Note that min, max, and median curves are based on the 30 years from 1991 to 2020.

temperatures in April, the small amount of snow (4.9 inches at Red Mtn Pass) remaining at higher elevations will lead to a much lower total, and peak, in streamflow for 2026.

- Discharge at the USGS gauge on the Uncompahgre River near Ridgway has remained well below median flow since April 7th following the March warm spell and early snowmelt and runoff. Discharge rose slightly after the snowstorm on May 6th, and on May 8th discharge was 72 cfs, well below the median discharge of 197 cfs. A Colorado River Basin Forecast Center (CRBFC) streamflow forecast showed a steady increase in discharge to about 230 cfs on May 13th. (As of 5/11/26 increased flow has not been noted at Ridgway, but the USGS gauge at Ouray went above 100 cfs on 5/11/26.)
- Discharge at the USGS gauge on Dallas Creek showed a continued period of very low flow that started on about March 27th. Since then, discharge at the gauge has mostly been below 4 cfs. At mid-morning on May 8th the discharge was 1.35 cfs, compared to the median of 27 cfs. In contrast to the forecast for the Uncompahgre, the CRBFC indicated little change in flow on Dallas Creek through May 13th.

The initial UWP streamflow measurements on Dallas Creek at the RW sampling site and the Hyde-Sneva ditch are shown in Table 2. Both measurements indicated a decrease in discharge between the RW site and the USGS gauge. The return flows in the Hyde-Sneva ditch represented about 57% and 72% of the discharges measured at the RW site on the two days and were about the same as the discharge differences between the two Dallas locations.

Table 2. Data from discharge measurements on Dallas Creek at the River Watch site on CR24 and at the USGS gauge 3.25 miles downstream. The last column shows discharge at the Hyde-Sneva ditch in Ridgway. Note that the May measurement on Hyde-Sneva was on May 5th.

RW Site	Date	RW Site Discharge	USGS Gauge Discharge	CR24 to USGS Difference	Hyde-Sneva Discharge
			3.25 mi downstream		
Dallas Cr at CR24	04/20/26	1.41	0.74	-0.7	0.81
Dallas Cr at CR24	05/03/26	1.50	0.52	-1.0	1.08

- Water quality measurements below the mine processing facility on Sneffels Creek

After recent discussions regarding metal discharge compliance issues at the mine processing facility on Sneffels Creek, a review of past and recent water quality data on Sneffels Creek was completed. Water quality data have been collected on Sneffels Creek, both above and below the mine facility, by several different groups including past and present mine owners. The data shown here were collected between 2012 and 2024 by the Water Quality Control Division, by the UWP during a creek remediation project, and by River Watch. Figure 2 shows the locations of these sampling sites.

The two sampling sites analyzed in this report were SC-06 (Imogene Pass Bridge) located immediately below where discharge from the mine facility enters Sneffels Creek, and WQX-10695, SC-04, and RW-959 on Sneffels Creek at Camp Bird about 1.3 miles below the mine facility. Figure 2 shows dissolved zinc (Zn-D) concentrations at the two sites. For 2012 – 2015 and 2023 – 2024, samples were collected during high flow months (May, June, or July) and low flow months (August, September, or October). The most obvious result was that Zn-D concentrations were highest, at high flow and low flow, at the Imogene Pass Bridge (red circles) just below the mine facility. In 2012, 2015, 2023, and 2024, zinc concentrations at high flow were greater than low flow concentrations. In 2013 and 2014 the opposite was true. For fifteen of the 26 samples the Zn-D chronic TVS for aquatic life were exceeded, and the 85th percentile of the concentrations was greater than the TVS based on the mean hardness of all samples. Analysis of samples before 2023 and for the 2023-2024 data set produced similar results.

The 2022 303(d) List for this segment of Sneffels Creek included Zn-D, Cd-D and Pb-D. The results shown here confirm the 303(d) listing for Zn-D, but similar analyses for Cd-D and Pb-D (not shown) indicated both metals attained their chronic TVS for aquatic life.

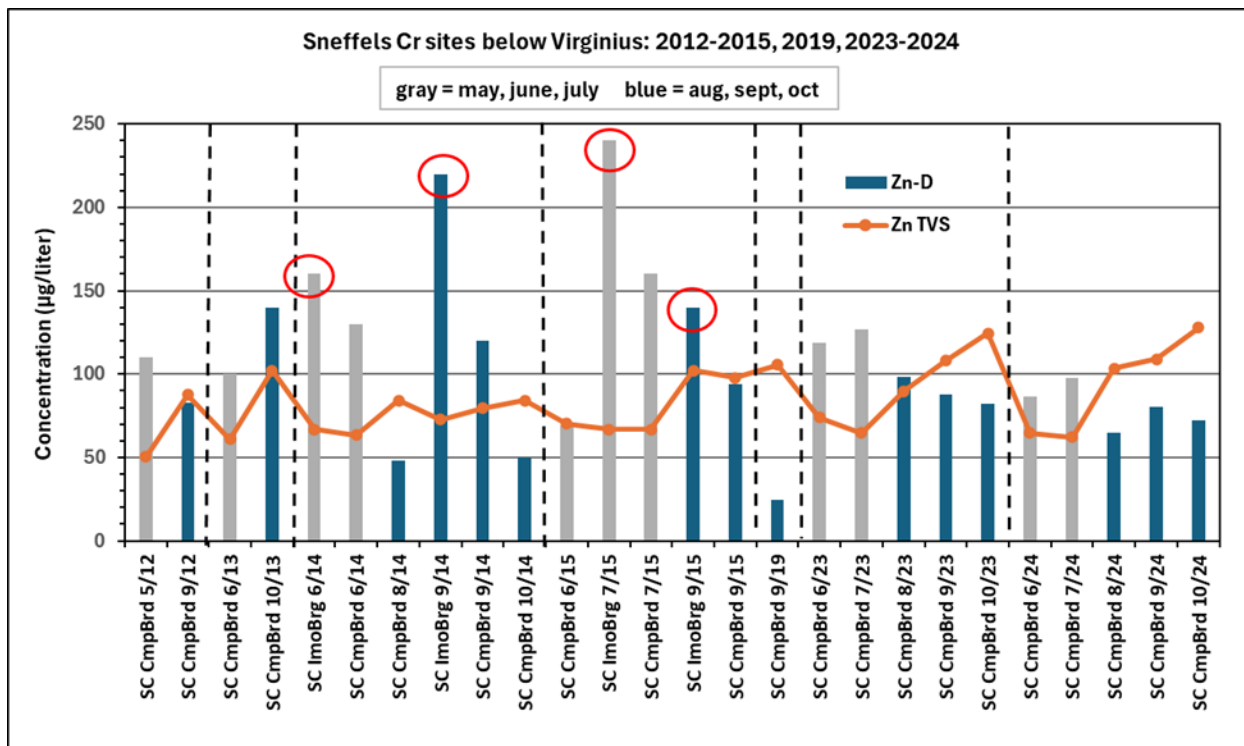


Figure 2. Dissolved zinc concentrations on Sneffels Creek at Imogene Pass Rd (red circles) and Camp Bird sites. Collection years are separated by vertical dashed lines. Gray bars show high flow data and blue bars show low flow data. The aquatic life TVS is shown by the tan line.

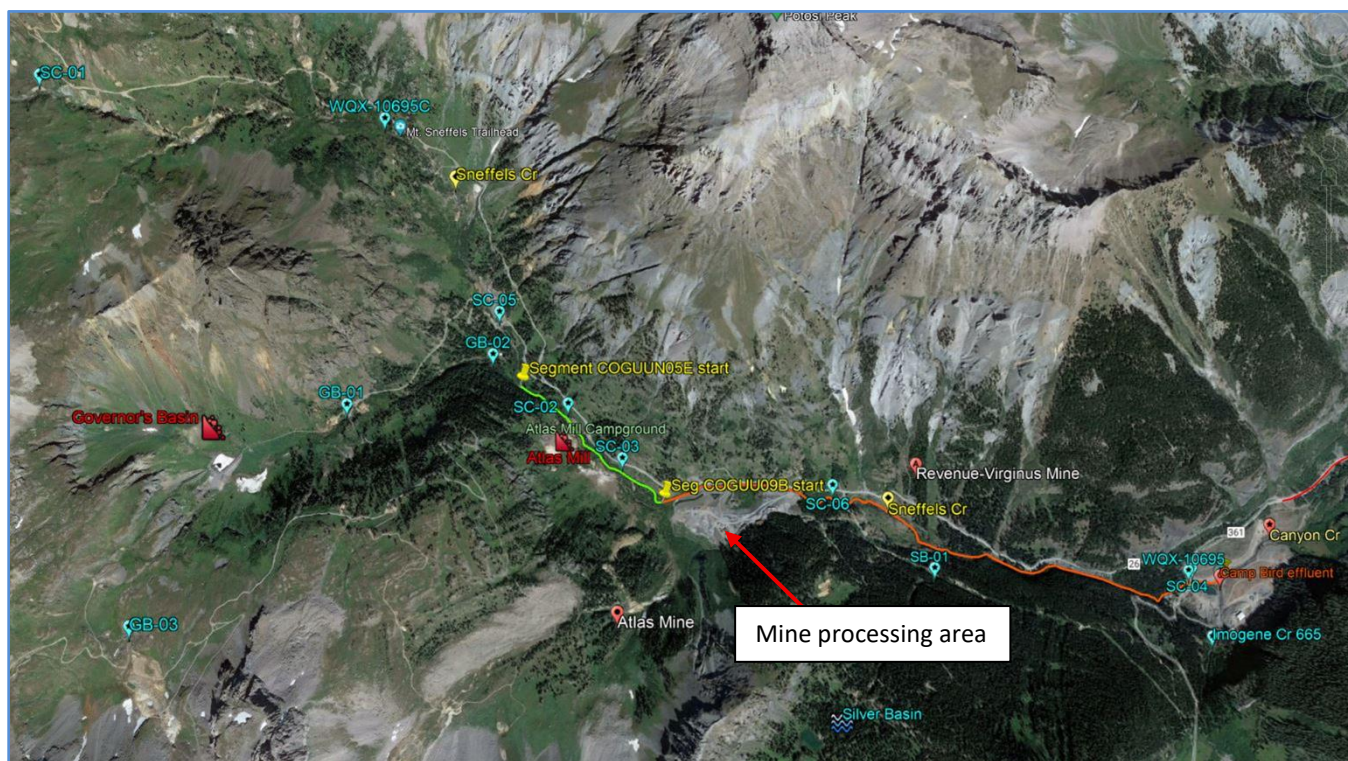


Figure 3. Map of the Sneffels/Canyon Creek drainage showing water quality sampling sites (blue icons and labels). Sneffels Creek above the mine facility is shown by the green line, and by the tan line below the mine facility.