



CENTER for BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Because life is good.

[Bookmark and Share](#)

For Immediate Release, August 6, 2015

[E-mail this page](#)
[More press releases](#)Contact: Taylor McKinnon, (801) 300-2414 or tmckinnon@biologicaldiversity.org

EPA Response to Million-gallon Mine Waste Spill in Colorado Deeply Inadequate

Feds Downplay Wildlife Impacts, Ignore Downstream Endangered Fish, Birds

DURANGO, Colo.— The Center for Biological Diversity today blasted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for downplaying the possibility of impacts to fish and wildlife from a million-gallon spill of toxic mine waste into Cement Creek and the Animas River in southwestern Colorado on Wednesday.

Both rivers feed the San Juan River in New Mexico and Utah, which contains habitat for several species of federally endangered fish and birds. Many of these, including razorback suckers and Colorado pikeminnow, are already afflicted by exposure to toxic compounds, such as selenium and mercury, associated with mine waste.

In a [statement](#) late Wednesday, the EPA pointed to fish populations already decimated by mine pollution to downplay the potential for downstream impacts, claiming that “due to current and longstanding water quality impairment associated with heavy metals there are no fish populations in the Cement Creek watershed and populations in the Animas River have historically been impaired for several miles downstream of Silverton.”

“The fact that fish populations in the upper Animas have already been decimated by mining pollution offers no comfort to concerns about pollution impacts farther downstream,” said Taylor McKinnon with the Center.

“Endangered species downstream of this spill are already afflicted by same toxic compounds like mercury and selenium that may be in this waste,” said McKinnon. “These species are hanging by a thread, and every new bit of toxic exposure makes a bad situation worse. EPA’s downplaying of potential impacts is troubling and raises deeper questions about the thoroughness of its mine-reclamation efforts.”

The Center will seek records from the federal agency about this week’s spill under the Freedom of Information Act. It will scrutinize the EPA’s compliance with the Endangered Species Act and other laws in connection with potential impacts to endangered species from mine-reclamation programs and disasters.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 900,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

[Alaska](#) • [Arizona](#) • [California](#) • [Florida](#) • [Minnesota](#) • [Nevada](#) • [New Mexico](#) • [New York](#) • [Oregon](#) • [Vermont](#) • [Washington, DC](#)
P.O. Box 710 • Tucson, AZ 85702-0710 tel: (520) 623.5252 fax: (520) 623.9797 www.BiologicalDiversity.org

[Go back](#)

The Center for Biological Diversity today completed a spatial analysis showing that **mine waste pollution traveling downstream from the Gold King Mine in the Animas River will impact 197 river miles of federally-designated critical habitat on the San Juan River for endangered Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and threatened southwest willow flycatcher.** It also includes proposed critical habitat for federally threatened yellow-billed cuckoo.

A map showing the critical habitat and the mine spill origin is available for media use here: http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public_lands/mining/pdfs/GoldKingMineSpill.pdf

Please credit: Curt Bradley, Center for Biological Diversity

Information about the threatened and endangered species is here:

[Razorback sucker](#)

[Colorado pikeminnow](#)

[Southwestern willow flycatcher](#)

[Yellow-billed cuckoo](#)

Thanks,
Taylor

Taylor McKinnon

[Center for Biological Diversity](#)

801.300.2414

tmckinnon@biologicaldiversity.org