



Office of Natural Resources Trustee

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of Natural Resources Trustee releases draft restoration plan for the 2015 Gold King Mine release

Draft plan proposes funding for four projects to compensate public for injuries caused by contamination

ALBUQUERQUE — The New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee (ONRT) announced today that it is seeking public comment on a draft plan to fund four projects with \$1 million recovered from Sunnyside Gold Corporation for injuries in New Mexico resulting from the August 2015 Gold King Mine blowout.

The proposed projects are:

- Construction of Cedar Hill Boat Ramp on the Animas River proposed by San Juan County
- Construction of Festival and Farmer’s Market Pavilion at Gateway Park proposed by the City of Farmington
- Implementation of San Juan Valley Soil Health Restoration Project proposed by the San Juan County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Implementing Agricultural Irrigation System Upgrade Project proposed by the Tse Daa Kaan (Hogback) Navajo Community

Six years ago, a blowout at the Gold King Mine in Colorado released millions of gallons of water laden with toxic metals and acidic waste into the Animas and San Juan Rivers. The plume of contaminated water adversely affected New Mexico residents, agricultural and recreational tourism industries, and natural resources along those rivers. In January 2021, the State of New Mexico and Sunnyside Corporation reached a settlement that includes a payment of \$1 million to ONRT to implement natural resource restoration projects. Litigation against other parties involved in the spill, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its contractors is ongoing.

“With these projects, the state is taking the next step in making whole communities that were so negatively affected by the Gold King Mine release,” said Trustee Maggie Hart Stebbins. “We are honoring the requests of area residents in funding these projects that will benefit farmers who still struggle with the lingering stigma of the spill and residents who use the river for recreation.”

To begin the restoration planning process, ONRT published a press release and sent a letter to local stakeholders on July 15, 2021, to solicit project proposals. ONRT evaluated all proposed restoration projects and has completed the *Draft Restoration Plan for the Gold King Mine Release into the Animas and San Juan Rivers, San Juan County, NM* which includes a description of proposed projects and results of the evaluation. The Draft Restoration Plan and other Gold King Mine documents are available on ONRT’s website at <https://onrt.env.nm.gov/gold-king-mine-documents/>

or may be requested from the New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee, 121 Tijeras NE, Suite 1000, Albuquerque, NM 87102, (505) 313-1837. A hard copy may be viewed at the New Mexico Environment Department, Farmington Field Office, 1800 E 30th St, Suite B, Farmington, NM 87401 (505) 566-9741.

Interested parties are invited to comment on the draft plan. The public comment period starts on January 31 and ends on March 2, 2022. Comments should be addressed to Michelle Hunter, New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee, at nm.onrt@state.nm.us or at 121 Tijeras Avenue NE, Suite 1000, Albuquerque, NM 87102, and should reference: *Draft Restoration Plan for the Gold King Mine Release*. Comments must be received in writing on or before 5:00 PM MST on March 2, 2022. Comments received after the deadline may not be considered. Written comments received during the public comment period will be evaluated by ONRT and incorporated into the Final Restoration Plan, as appropriate.

For more information on New Mexico's settlement with the mining defendants, Sunnyside Corporation and its parent companies, Kinross Gold Corporation and Kinross Gold, U.S.A., Inc., visit <https://onrt.env.nm.gov/gold-king-mine-and-bonita-peak-mining-district/> or <https://www.env.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-01-13-State-reaches-11-million-settlement-over-Gold-King-Mine-disaster.pdf>.

***About the Office of Natural Resources Trustee (ONRT):** ONRT is a state agency created by statute to ensure that New Mexico's natural resources that have been injured by the release of hazardous substances are restored for the full benefit of New Mexicans. ONRT assesses injury to natural resources caused by contamination and then seeks compensation from the responsible parties for restoration of those injured resources. The funds obtained through settlements are used to restore, replace, or acquire the equivalent of injured, destroyed or lost natural resources and the services they provide. For more information about ONRT, visit www.onrt.state.nm.us.*

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