

March 10, 2010
Laurel Ames
Watershed Network

Well, that's a pretty clear example of how the State Board and FS intend to contain our efforts! Good going Mike! Laurel

On 3/9/2010 3:24 PM, Michael Thornton wrote:

> Hi All:
> While I understand that it has already (and I think prematurely) been
> decided that abandoned mines and mercury are NOT going to be addressed
> as part of the process I am a bit disturbed by this statement from the
> meeting notes;
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> /"Mercury and abandoned mines: /Mine discharges are considered 'point
> source' so will not be dealt with as part of the plan. There is a
> separate program that deals with abandoned mines".
>
> After talking with The Sierra Fund Science Director, Carrie Monohan
> Ph.D she helped me to draft the following explanation.
>
> Mercury that was used during hydraulic mining is not solely a "mine
> discharge" issue, in fact the majority of ongoing
> mercury contamination is from mining debris entrained in river
> gravels. Furthermore mercury should not be considered a "point source"
> of pollution for two additional reasons.
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> First and foremost is that the deposition of hydraulic mining
> debris is spread over entire watersheds and continues to erode and be
> washed downstream with storm events and through other erosional
> processes.
>
> Second, the fate and transport of mercury from hydraulic mining
> deposits to downstream reaches is a pervasive problem that
> contaminates the entire aquatic foodchain and can't be traced back to
> a single source.
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> A recent investigation at the Humbug Creek confluence by USGS and
> BLM is an example of an area where BLM land contained hydraulic mining
> debris deposits which are contaminating many miles of downstream
> habitat in the South Yuba River with mercury. This area will likely be
> the focal point of BLM led remediation efforts to reduce mercury
> contamination to downstream reaches. The remediation will likely
> include bank stability and set backs to reduce erosion based on
> evolving best management practices.
>
> The US Forest Service as the largest public landowner in California
> has a unique opportunity and responsibility to address this important
> and pervasive source of water quality impairment, thereby becoming a
> leader in addressing California's longest running environmental
> problem "Mining's Toxic Legacy"
>
> Sincerely:
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- > Mike Thornton
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- > The Sierra Fund
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