



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8

1595 Wynkoop Street
Denver, CO 80202-1129
Phone 800-227-8917
www.epa.gov/region08

DEC 17 2014

Ref: 8EPR-SR

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Recommendation for an External Award:
An Environmental Achievement Award for Excellence in Site Reuse for Lake County,
Colorado

FROM: Frances L. Costanzi, Coordinator *Frances L. Costanzi*
R8 Superfund Redevelopment Initiative

THRU: Sandra Stavnes, Chair *Sandra Stavnes*
R8 Awards Committee

Martin Hestmark, Assistant Administrator *Martin Hestmark*
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

TO: Shaun L. McGrath
Regional Administrator

The Superfund Remedial Response Program in the Region 8 Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation is recommending an external Environmental Achievement Award for Excellence in Site Reuse be given to Lake County, Colorado for their efforts at the California Gulch Superfund Site.

Award Authority Background. The Environmental Achievement Award is a recognized award under EPA Order R8.3130.5, EPA External Awards Program. This award may be given by the Regional Administrator to individuals and groups external to the Region. The purpose of the Environmental Achievement Award is "[t]o recognize significant achievement in protection of public health or the environment, or in advancing the Agency's strategic goals."

Section 8001(a) of the Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) provides a basis for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to fund this award. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §6981(a)(5):

The Administrator...shall....conduct, and encourage, cooperate with, and render financial and other assistance to appropriate public (whether Federal, State, interstate, or local) authorities, agencies, and institution, private agencies and institutions, and individuals in the conduct of, and promote the coordination of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys, public education programs, and studies relating to...

(1) any adverse health and welfare effects of the release into the environment of material present in solid waste, and methods to eliminate such effects;

The presentation of this award promotes RCRA's goals of encouraging investigations, training, demonstrations, surveys and public education programs relating to any adverse health and welfare effects of the release into the environment of material present in solid waste and methods to eliminate such effects. These goals are shared with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA).

The Excellence in Site Reuse Award also promotes the EPA's efforts to increase public awareness of and participation in its decision-making processes. Public acknowledgement of the important roles and significant contributions that individuals, companies, organizations and/or communities can make to the EPA's cleanup and redevelopment programs will foster and facilitate future response and reuse successes. In addition, this award supports EPA's mission of protecting human health and the environment, highlights the advantages of reuse of contaminated property, and provides public education regarding the important role of community involvement in protection of human health and the environment.

Background for Principal Nominee, Lake County, Colorado

In the 1980s, Lake County and the City of Leadville, Colorado, faced the closure of its largest employer, high unemployment rates, and the cleanup of the remnants of over 140 years of mining, milling and smelting that spanned over 18 square miles. Today, Lake County has bounced back, with a vibrant, increasingly diversified economy focused on the area's rich heritage and remarkable natural resources.

Three key reuse projects: the Mineral Belt Trail, the Lake County Community Park and Soccer Fields, and the Restoration of the Upper Arkansas River, which recently received the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Gold Medal Designation for trout fishing, are attracting visitors from across the country.

Collaboration among the EPA, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), other federal agencies, local government, and potentially responsible parties (PRPs) made possible a traditional cleanup that has protected human health and the environment. Because the clean-up plan supported the community's goal of economic diversification, tourism and recreational amenities have expanded.

Superfund site cleanup and reuse often results in restored value to site properties and surrounding communities. Once a site property is ready for reuse, it can revitalize a local economy with jobs, new businesses, tax revenues and local spending, as well as provide valuable wildlife habitat and recreational amenities.

The California Gulch Superfund Site (Site) covers 18 square miles in Lake County, Colorado and contains twelve operable units (OUs). The Site includes the City of Leadville, which was deleted from the National Priorities List in 2011, and includes an 11-mile stretch of the Upper Arkansas River, where the work was completed in 2013.

Eligibility

Lake County is eligible for the Environmental Achievement Award for Excellence in Site Reuse. Lake County has been instrumental in the vision, planning, construction, and management of the Mineral Belt

accountants, grant writers, heavy-machine operators from Colorado Mountain College's Ski Operations Program and the county road and bridge crew, contractors of all sorts, restaurant owners and engineering students from the Colorado School of Mines. Fundraising efforts to reach the \$1.5 million needed to complete the first phase have ranged from the "Playground Penny Pot" spearheaded by first graders at Pitts Elementary School to bake sales, golf tournaments and yard sales. More than 200 Leadville families have contributed over \$100 a piece, and foundations, local governments and area businesses have kicked in sizable donations to help reach the goal.

The OU11 remedy, as well as other remedies at the site have contributed to the restoration of the Arkansas River. In 2014 the upper Arkansas River was added to the Gold Medal Trout Waters in Colorado. The designation has been 20 years in the making, and although anglers have enjoyed the improved conditions for years, it is an official acknowledgement of the myriad efforts undertaken by state and federal agencies, local governments and stakeholders to turn an impaired river into one of the most popular fishing destinations in Colorado. This designation has furthered the area's recreation opportunities, economic benefits through recreation tourism, and has increased tax revenue. In 2012, over 100,000 anglers visited the area's recently designated Gold Medal Trout Waters, generating \$18.2 million in net annual economic benefits.

4. Leadership in innovation and sustainability (green remediation, renewable energy, new land uses, smart growth, green infrastructure)

Contaminated land was innovatively repurposed to support the Mineral Belt Trail on an unused railroad grade, the Lake County Community Park and Soccer Fields on a former smelter site, and bike trails along the Arkansas River in previously impaired ranch land in the floodplain.

After an unsuccessful attempt, Lake County reapplied and received a \$400,000 EPA Brownfields grant in May 2014 for site assessments in Lake County, redevelopment along County Road 36, development of a brownfields inventory and community outreach.

5. Environmental stewardship (watershed and fishery management, environmental restoration, ecosystem benefits)

Lake County supported EPA's and Colorado Parks and Wildlife's efforts to environmentally restore the Arkansas River which is now a Gold Medal fishery. Additionally, the Hayden Meadows Reservoir, also located in OU11, was constructed by Lake County with Great Outdoors Colorado Funding and Fishing is Fun, along with some other contributions. It was completed in 2003.

6. Innovation in creative thinking and effective use of partnerships

Lake County, through its Assessor and Building departments and in coordination with the Lake County Open Space Initiative and other local groups, managed land ownership and liability insurance requirements necessary to build and operate the Mineral Belt Trail.

7. Design of reuse complementary with sustainability of selected remedy

In order to help kickoff the project in OU5, the U.S. Soccer Foundation, one of EPA's national partners, awarded a \$10,000 grant to develop conceptual plans for the future Lake County Community Park. With the plan completed, the Lake County Advisory board began seeking additional funding for construction of the complex. The soccer field and adjacent park opened in 2009.

Trail, the Lake County Community Park and Soccer Fields, and the restoration of the Upper Arkansas River.

Lake County has shown outstanding contributions to environmental protection by ongoing actions over an appreciable period of time. Lake County contributed to a significant achievement resulting in a visible or measurable improvement to the physical environment. Lake County has also shown superior achievement in community-based environmental protection and involvement, environmental sustainability, as well as cooperative team efforts (partnering) with the state and other local governments, business and organizations, to instill environmental awareness and achieve environmental goals. Specific examples of these actions are detailed further below.

Excellence in Site Reuse Evaluation Criteria for Region 8 Award Candidates

1. Enhancement of the selected remedy (includes accelerated cleanups and remedial cost savings)

Reuse work by Lake County led to the creation of the Mineral Belt Trail as part of remedy for Operable Unit 3, Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad Company Slag Piles/Railroad Easement/Railroad Yard; a soccer field (the highest elevated, lighted, synthetic turf field in the world) used as part of the remedy for Operable Unit 5 (OU5) ASARCO Smelters/Slag/Mill Sites; and bike trails along the Upper Arkansas in Operable Unit 11 (OU11), Arkansas River Valley Floodplain.

2. Reduction of EPA's and/or a state's long-term stewardship responsibilities

Lake County has been instrumental in assisting EPA and CDPHE with institutional controls necessary for the long-term protectiveness of the remedy.

3. Community benefits (environmental justice considerations, jobs, tax revenues, economic growth, recreation)

The 12.5 mile Mineral Belt Trail integrated portions of the grades of the three major rail lines that served the Leadville Mining District around the turn of the century and is a recreational reuse asset for the Site. This paved trail loops the City of Leadville, passes through historic mining areas and offers stunning views of the Rocky Mountains. The Mineral Belt Trail provides access to some of the community's most significant historic and cultural resources, including evidence of early exploration to the transportation systems that were built to service the active mines, the community that sprang up to meet the needs of the residents, and the smelting industry that processed the ores. Its alignment parallels California Gulch, site of Leadville's first gold strike and earliest settlement, and cuts through the heart of the mineral belt that earned Leadville the moniker of "Colorado's Silver City." The trail instills in you the sense of the pioneering spirit of the rugged men and women who endured the unbelievable hardships of the harsh alpine environment to scrape and gouge a living from the unforgiving mountainsides, and carve Leadville from the inhospitable landscape above 10,000 feet. In warmer months, the paved surface serves as a hiking, biking or rollerblading trail. During the winter, trail workers groom the Mineral Belt Trail for skate skiing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and winter biking.

The soccer field and community park in OU5 has added many recreational benefits to the community. The residents of Leadville and Twin Lakes aren't afraid of a little hard work. After four years of fundraising and volunteering, Lake County Community Park and Fairgrounds opened on August 29, 2009. The new park features an all-weather synthetic turf field with lights, restrooms and an adjacent playground. The planning for this project started in 2005. Since then, volunteers have included

Recognition of Additional Parties

Many people and organizations are involved in the successful remediation and reuse of a Superfund site. In addition to presenting an award to our principle nominee, Lake County, Colorado, the Region would like to recognize the following organizations and individuals for superior achievement in environmental sustainability by presenting them with certificates of appreciation.

Lake County Assessor's Office

The Lake County Assessor's office under the leadership of Howard Tritz, worked to identify land ownership in the planning of the Mineral Belt Trail.

Lake County Building and Land Use Department

All building projects are approved by the Lake County Building and Land Use Department. This department notifies permit applicants of any land reuse restrictions/institutional controls that protect the integrity of the remedies.

City of Leadville

The City of Leadville cooperated in the development of the reuse projects and especially for the Mineral Belt Trail, and is assisting with institutional controls by implementing ordinances.

Lake County Open Space Initiative

Lake County Open Space Initiative, under the leadership of Mike Conlin, was the architect in managing the land ownership, access and insurance liability issues in developing and constructing the Mineral Belt Trail.

Peter Frykholm

Peter Frykholm, former Chair of the Lake County Community Park Project, was instrumental in obtaining the US Soccer Federation grant for the planning and construction of the soccer fields.

Greg Policky – Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Greg Policky is an aquatic biologist with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. He has championed regulated flows on the Arkansas River which stabilizes the engineered remedy features along the river. He spearheads the fish habitat restoration along the Arkansas River. He nominated the Upper Arkansas River for its Gold Medal designation.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Our colleagues in the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment worked hand in hand with EPA and Lake County to complete the Mineral Belt Trail, build the soccer fields, and revive the Arkansas River.



Shaun L. McGrath
Regional Administrator