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Stakeholders should be open, accessible

Article Last Updated: Thursday, September 24, 2015 8:36pm

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In response to Bill Simon's op-ed (Herald, Sept. 13): If the Animas River Stakeholders Group is sincerely dedicated to providing a forum to broaden community awareness, it should try to disseminate information more effectively. Start with updating the ARSG website to notify stakeholders (that's anyone who lives by, recreates in, irrigates with or drinks from, the 100-mile-long Animas River) of meetings, how it's funded, what expertise decision-makers have and which interests they represent, for we stakeholders to understand their perspectives and motivations.

He complains stakeholders downstream are bashing the residents of Silverton: "(Silverton) has its own pristine drinking water sources and has no need for irrigation water because there is no agriculture within the county. Yet its residents have led the effort to remediate the mining legacy of pollution for more than 21 years."

The ARSG was formed in order to prevent a Superfund designation because Silverton had to improve water standards in agreement with the Clean Water Act of 1972. Ironically, if people blame Silverton, it might be that ARSG has promoted that idea in the press and on their website (FAQs): "The Upper Animas River basin has been considered and continues to be considered a possible Superfund site" and "Stakeholders fear that Superfund will lead to unwarranted actions, higher costs, litigation and the withholding of information, reduced property values and fewer opportunities for community self determination."

If, as Simon pleads, the ARSG is determined to be a forum for disseminating unbiased information based on science, regulations and experience, update the website and make records public. Host a forum on Superfund and other options, announce meetings, and vary venues among the stakeholders so more can participate. Tens of thousands of people living downstream are perplexed that 600 residents of San Juan County get to decide what their water quality will be, and whether or not their properties are devalued because of the rampant pollution coming from the Upper Animas. We don't have the luxury of self-determination, as the residents of Silverton have had. It's really not that hard to understand.

Kate Bentham Britz

Durango

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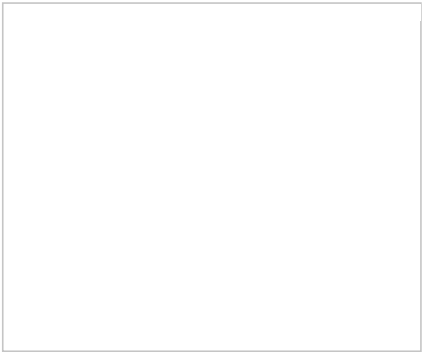
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