

**Office of Natural Resources Trustee****MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR**

Maggie Hart Stebbins, Trustee

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Office of the Natural Resources seeking project ideas to restore resources harmed by 2015 Gold King Mine disaster

Stakeholder input essential component of environmental, economic restoration planning process

The New Mexico Office of the Natural Resources Trustee (ONRT) is seeking ideas from the public for restoration projects to be funded through a proposed \$1 million settlement with the mining defendants in litigation following the 2015 Gold King Mine release. The mining defendants include Sunnyside Corporation and its parent companies, Kinross Gold Corporation and Kinross Gold, U.S.A., Inc. This outreach is an important step toward restoring natural resources affected by the release.

In August 2015, a blowout at the Gold King Mine in Colorado released millions of gallons of water laden with toxic metals and acid mine drainage into the Animas and San Juan Rivers. The contamination adversely affected New Mexico residents, the agricultural and recreational tourism industries, and natural resources along those rivers. In January 2021, the State and the mining defendants reached a settlement that includes a payment of \$1 million by the mining defendants to ONRT to implement natural resource restoration projects. Court approval of the settlement is pending.

Litigation against other parties involved in the spill, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its contractors, is ongoing.

Projects eligible for funding must:

- Be related to the Animas and/or San Juan Rivers
- Benefit surface water, wildlife, and/or aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and/or
- Benefit the agriculture, outdoor recreation or other industries that rely on a healthy river
- Address any existing impairments to those rivers

Eligible projects must have a broad public benefit and a direct tie to the environmental injuries caused by the release, including adverse economic impacts. The deadline for submitting project ideas is August 21, 2021.

Ultimately, ONRT will prepare a draft Restoration Plan describing how proposed projects were evaluated and which were selected. Projects will be selected and a final Restoration Plan will be published by January 2022.

About Office of the Natural Resources Trustee (ONRT): The 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. The ONRT assesses injury to natural resources caused by the contamination and then seeks compensation from the responsible parties for restoration of those injured resources. The funds 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 the ONRT, visit www.onrt.state.nm.us.

“Communities whose jobs, livelihoods and environment were directly affected by the Gold King Mine release will know best how this funding can be put to good use,” said Trustee Hart Stebbins. “We recognize that this funding will not fully repair or restore all the injuries caused by the Gold King Mine release, but it represents a significant first step toward that goal.”

There will be a virtual informational stakeholder meeting from 3-4:30 p.m. July 28. Register for the meeting [here](#).

More information about the project solicitation process, eligibility and evaluation criteria is available [here](#).

The settlement funds are restricted by the provisions of the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 and other applicable laws.

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