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NEWS RELEASE

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EPA's Data Indicate Post-Spill Metals Contamination in San Juan River

SALT LAKE CITY (Feb. 12, 2016) -- The Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) recently discovered water sample results taken by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in September and October 2015 that showed elevated levels of metals. The information was found by Department employees in a posting on the EPA's website and had not been previously shared with Utah officials.

The samples showed dissolved water concentrations of metals in the San Juan River that exceeded Utah water quality criteria. This does not indicate a threat to drinking water, recreation or livestock, based on an evaluation of the data by the Utah Department of Health, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food and Utah Department of Natural Resources.

"We are investigating to see if these metal concentrations were associated with the recent Gold King incident, historical releases of metals from abandoned mines, storm events or other unknown sources," said Walt Baker, director of the Division of Water Quality.

EPA data revealed several peaks in metal concentrations, including aluminum, arsenic, copper, lead, and iron, that exceeded the highest concentrations previously observed by DEQ in the San Juan River, including samples collected immediately after the Aug. 5, 2015, mine release and other data in long-term monitoring records.

To ensure the safety of Utah residents, DEQ is taking three initial steps:

- DEQ has sought additional information from the EPA regarding these tests through a Freedom of Information Act inquiry for this information. It is expected that the EPA will comply with this request.
- DEQ will immediately initiate a new round of water-quality sampling on the San Juan River to determine whether the higher metal concentrations persist.
- To assess possible water quality impacts from historic and future metals releases from mines in the San Juan River watershed, the agency will work to develop an appropriate long-term monitoring plan.

Summary data tables for DEQ water quality sampling, sediment sampling, and EPA sampling are available at www.deq.utah.gov/Topics/Water/goldkingmine/data.htm

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About DEQ

Established in 1991, the Utah Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) mission is to safeguard public health

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