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NEWS RELEASE

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State Agencies to Focus on Long Term Impacts of Mine Plume Now that the Highest Levels of Concentrations Have Passed Through The San Juan River

SALT LAKE CITY – Utah State agencies are encouraged by improving water quality in the San Juan River based on the latest samples analyzed this week.

Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) scientists believe that the highest levels of contaminants associated with the initial spill event have passed through the San Juan River in Utah. Water test results suggest that the plume carrying lead, arsenic and other heavy metals from the spill present little health risk to users as it has been settled and diluted while making its way to Lake Powell.

DEQ, in coordination with state and federal agencies, is now turning its attention on a long-term monitoring strategy that will focus on sediments and what, if any, remediation efforts may need to occur.

“Our focus has been on the acute effects of the spill.” said Walt Baker, director of DEQ’s Division of Water Quality. “This effort will be maintained for a while longer but we will be working with our partners on a long-term monitoring plan.”

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and San Juan Public Health have evaluated the most current data and find that recreational exposures to the San Juan River are not expected to result in adverse health effects. UDOH does recommend that recreational users bring along their own drinking water while visiting the river and not rely on personal devices for filtration/purification of river water. Visitors to the river, especially in the case of children, should refrain from ingesting the water and are also encouraged to minimize skin contact with dirt and sand along the river. People who come in contact with sediment should rinse off promptly after contact, and as always, wash hands well with soap and water before eating.

DEQ continues to coordinate with three San Juan County water systems regulated by the State of Utah (Mexican Hat, Bluff, and Sand Island) in regards to monitoring the public drinking water wells located near the San Juan River. None of these three water systems draw their source waters directly from the San Juan River. Mexican Hat’s long-term monitoring strategy includes taking metals samples from its wells this week, and continuing periodic metals sampling as needed beginning in six months’ time. Public water systems on tribal lands are being managed by the appropriate authorities such as the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority.

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The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) lifted its advisories against using San Juan River water for crop irrigation and livestock watering. Utah State University's veterinary toxicologist reports the river's highest levels of contamination pose no adverse effects on plants, soils and animals.

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) collected fish tissue samples that will be tested at a lab in Denver. However, no fish kills have been documented along the San Juan River or Lake Powell. DWR is working with DEQ to develop a long term plan to continue monitoring fish populations.

For ongoing updates and information visit

<http://www.deq.utah.gov/Topics/Water/goldkingmine/index.htm>

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