



Enforcement News

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

Lahontan Regional Water Board Acts to Prevent Acid Spills From Leviathan Mine Following Unusually Wet Winter

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SOUTH LAKE TAHOE – The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board’s contractor has begun summer treatment of acid mine drainage (AMD) at the Leviathan Mine Superfund Site in what looks to be a record year for treatment. Treatment of the AMD prevents toxic discharges from the mine to Leviathan Creek, Bryant Creek, and the East Fork Carson River.

As a result of the highest amount of rain and snowfall since 1995, AMD from ponds at Leviathan Mine threatened to overflow in April. The Water Board mobilized a contractor three months earlier than normal to prevent overflow.

From April through May, the Water Board conducted spring treatment of the AMD to prevent discharge of untreated water. That operation treated over seven million gallons of AMD. Summer treatment operations that have just begun are expected to treat an additional 10 to 15 million gallons of AMD, potentially making it the greatest amount of toxic mine drainage treated by the Water Board at the site.

“Staff did an amazing job taking proactive steps to prevent harmful discharges to the creeks below Leviathan Mine,” said Harold Singer, Executive Officer of the Lahontan Water Board. “We are on our way to completing a successful summer of treating water to protect both humans and aquatic life that use the waters of East Fork Carson River watershed.”

Leviathan Mine is an abandoned sulfur mine five miles east of Markleeville, California and six miles west of Topaz Lake, Nevada, formerly owned and operated by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in the 1950s and 1960s.

The State of California acquired the mine in 1984 to clean up water quality problems caused by the mining operations. The Water Board completed a pollution abatement project at the mine in 1985, and since 1999 has continued to actively treat waters discharged from the mine site.

Acid mine drainage is low pH (high acid) water containing dissolved toxic metals such as aluminum, arsenic, copper, nickel and zinc. The AMD is collected over the winter and spring and stored in five lined evaporation ponds at the site.

AMD treatment is accomplished by mixing lime with the AMD in a treatment plant. The lime raises the pH and causes the metals in the water to settle out. Clean water is separated from the settled metal sludge and discharged to Leviathan Creek. The remaining sludge is hauled to an appropriate waste disposal site. The clean water that goes to the creek meets U.S. Environmental Protection Agency discharge criteria.

The Lahontan Water Board protects and restores water quality in California east of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada crests from the Oregon border through the Mojave Desert.

For more information on the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, please visit their homepage at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/lahontan/>