

**APPLICATION FOR STATE OF COLORADO TARGETED BROWNFIELDS  
ASSESSMENT ASSISTANCE**

***The Idarado Houses Preservation Project***

***A joint project of the Trust for Land Restoration and the Ouray County Historical Society***

The Trust for Land Restoration (TLR) and the Ouray County Historical Society (OCHS) request the assistance of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to obtain a *Targeted Brownfields Assessment* of asbestos, lead paint contamination and other identifiable human and/or environmental health hazards that may exist in association with four historic structures known as the Idarado Houses.

The Idarado Houses are located in the Red Mountain Mining District of southern Ouray County, adjacent to US 550 and a popular highway turnout and interpretive overlook. The houses are viewed by several thousand passing motorists every day, and often visited and occasionally entered by people visiting the interpretive site, including history buffs, tourists, hikers, and gawkers.

TLR's objective is to acquire ownership of the four houses, in conjunction with OCHS, to assure their long-term stabilization and preservation. Once clean-up and stabilization are complete, TLR and OCHS will seek to transfer title to the County of Ouray, adding to the several other historic sites the county already owns. The re-use goal is to promote a better understanding of the present by learning about the past, enhance history-based tourism and provide passive viewing of the houses by the public. Public ownership of the Idarado Houses will also provide eligibility for State Historical Fund and other grants not available to the current owner.

The physical houses themselves are owned by the Idarado Mining Company, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Company. Idarado/Newmont has expressed a willingness to donate the buildings, but as a first step, cannot proceed with any action divesting its ownership of the houses until an environmental assessment has been completed.

The Idarado Houses sit in close proximity to the Red Mountain Mining District Interpretive Overlook, a highway turnout owned by the United States Forest Service (USFS). Two of the houses sit on land owned by Idarado/Newmont. The other two houses sit on USFS-administered public land. The Forest Service recognizes the historical significance of the houses sitting on their land, but questions their legality in being there. USFS staff has suggested TLR pursue a land exchange to remedy the problem. We have had preliminary discussions with a local mining group that has offered to help pursue that end.

There are many hurdles to overcome to bring the Idarado Houses into long-term, protective ownership. The first step toward resolving these many issues is to obtain the proposed Targeted Brownfield Assessment.

## 1. Contacts

The Trust for Land Restoration  
POB 743; 555 W. Clinton St.  
Ridgway CO 81432

Patrick Willits, Executive Director  
970-626-3236 (O); 970-596-5479 (C)  
[willits@independence.net](mailto:willits@independence.net)

Ouray County Historical Society  
POB 151; 420 6<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Ouray CO 81427

Don Paulson, Curator  
970-325-4576 (O); 970-626-8160 (C)  
[drpaulson@ouraynet.com](mailto:drpaulson@ouraynet.com)

## 2. Site/Project location

Provide the site name and address, including city, county, zip code and total acreage.

Idarado Houses  
US 550, Mile Marker \_\_\_\_  
Red Mountain Mining District  
Ouray County, Colorado 81427  
37° 54' 51" North, 107° 42' 10" West

*If available, provide a map of the site:* See Attached

*Provide amount of delinquent property taxes (if any):* N/A

*Provide assessed value of the property:* N/A

## 3. Site History and Current Status

*Briefly describe the known past and current uses of the site:*

What we now call the Idarado Houses were originally built in the late 19th or early 20th century in Eureka, Colorado, east of Silverton, and were four of 10 houses moved over Red Mountain Pass to the Idarado millsite near the Treasury Tunnel, where they sit today.

Essentially all of the buildings in Eureka were owned by the Sunnyside Mining Company. In 1948 Sunnyside dismantled the mill in Eureka and sold the houses. Some of them went to Durango and ten of them were purchased by the Idarado Mining Company, to house miners and workers at the modern mill that had been built in 1937, and moved to their present location.

Newmont Mining Company purchased the Treasury Tunnel and other mining assets in Ouray and San Miguel counties in 1939, forming the Idarado Mining Company as a subsidiary. Idarado extended the Treasury Tunnel to connect to mine workings on the Telluride side during World War II. In 1956 Idarado moved its milling operations to the Telluride-side, reducing the workforce on the Ouray-side. Still, the Idarado Houses remained mostly occupied until Idarado shut down all its mining and milling operations on both sides in 1978. There is some evidence that at least one of the four houses was continued to be used as an office for a number of years after the mine was shut down, probably up until the time reclamation began in 1992.

Though they are in various states of dis-repair, considering the harsh environment of the San Juan Mountains at 11,000 feet above sea level, the four remaining Idarado Houses have weathered fairly well. In the mid-2000s, the Ouray County Historical Society received a \$40,000 grant from the Colorado State Historical Society and hired an engineer to perform a structural evaluation of the buildings, and prepare cost estimates to protect, preserve and minimally restore the houses. Concurrently, OCHS provided funds for a contractor to perform emergency roof repairs to two of the buildings. Volunteers followed, installing painted plywood in broken out windows and exterior doorways of a couple of the buildings.

Though vandals have broken out the glass in most of the houses, today the houses receive a fair amount of attention and visitation from passing motorists, and from those who stop at the interpretive overlook. People often get out of their cars and walk around the site, some sticking their heads into door openings, and some climbing in and walking around the houses.

*Describe local/state/federal regulatory involvement at the site (e.g. whether CDPHE or EPA has already invested funds in the property or if there is an ongoing or planned state/federal enforcement action at the site). Information should include whether or not there has ever been a response action taken at the site either under CERCLA or RCRA. Describe environmental conditions, including level and type of contamination (if known) and a summary of any known past environmental investigations.*

The Idarado Houses are a small part of the much larger Idarado Natural Resource Damages Reclamation site, as agreed to as part of a 1992 court-approved settlement between the State of Colorado and Idarado/Newmont. CDPHE and DRMS share regulatory oversight. The Idarado Houses themselves do not appear to have been placed on contaminated soil, and there are no obvious signs of underground storage tanks, transformers, or hazardous PCBs. Likely sources of health concern in conjunction with the houses themselves has been identified as asbestos and lead paint, though it is possible a TBA may identify other issues.

*Summarize past and present developer interest.* N/A

*Describe past, current, and future ownership status. If property is not owned by applicant, describe how applicant anticipates obtaining access to property in order to conduct assessment activities.*

The physical houses themselves are owned by the Idarado Mining Company, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Company. Idarado/Newmont has expressed a willingness to donate the buildings to TLR or another appropriate entity, but as a first step, cannot proceed with any decision-making or action divesting its ownership of the houses until an environmental assessment has been completed. Two of the houses sit on land owned by Idarado/Newmont. Two of the houses sit on public land administered by the United States Forest Service. TLR is in discussion with both Idarado/Newmont and the Forest Service regarding the fate of the houses. Idarado/Newmont is supporting this assessment request, and will grant access.

#### **4. Project Period**

*State the desired project completion time period and schedule.*

Our objective is to obtain a TBA before snow blocks reasonable physical access this fall, in order to continue discussions with both Idarado/Newmont and USFS through the fall. Our goal is to take possession of the buildings (but not the underlying land) as soon as is possible, preform emergency stabilization efforts now, plan for long-term stabilization, preservation and re-use as a history-based tourism site as soon as weather permits, apply for grants, work with the Forest Service, and figure out the underlying land issues over a longer period of time

#### **5. Assurance of Future Redevelopment of the Site**

*Describe how the site ownership will be controlled (i.e., publicly owned either directly by a municipality or through a quasi-public entity, such as a community development corporation).*

TLR's objective is to acquire ownership of the four houses, in conjunction with OCHS, from Idarado/Newmont, to assure their long-term stabilization and preservation. Once clean-up and emergency stabilization is complete, TLR and OCHS will prepare a management plan, and will seek to transfer title to the County of Ouray, which owns several other historic sites in the county. The re-use goal is to promote history-based tourism and passive viewing of the houses by the public. Public ownership will also provide eligibility for State Historical Fund and other grants not available to the current owner.

The management plan, like other management plans TLR and OCHS have prepared for other sites owned by Ouray County, will include preservation, interpretation and people-management objectives. Like other publicly-owned historic structures in Ouray and San Juan Counties, the number one TLR and OCHS objective, is to stabilize the houses in a manner that protects the houses from further deterioration, which often includes re-roofing, and redirecting drainage away from the foundations. Next steps are to install lexan/plexiglass in the window –openings; doors in the door openings; clean out and strip insides down to their bare, wooden-board walls; remove trash and debris from the outside; and place interpretive signing. Experience has shown that providing interpretive signage and not-locking doors helps lead to less vandalism.

*Describe the roles of all other key stakeholders in the project (i.e., community organizations, state involvement, city involvement, etc.).*

As discussed above, USFS and Idarado/Newmont are the key stakeholders that have helped advance the project thus far, and will be critical to achieving long-term success. TLR and OCHS have consulted with, and are keeping the San Juan County Historical Society engaged, and can count them as a partner as well. We have previewed our efforts to the Ouray County BOCC, and anticipate eventually transferring title to the houses to the County of Ouray at some point in the future. We've also received support and advice from the management of Ouray Silver Mines, Inc., the most active mining company working in Ouray County today.

Frankly we also see CDPHE and DRMS as key stakeholders, and are grateful for their willingness to assist with this project.

*Describe efforts directed towards community involvement (i.e., is the community aware of the project, and do they support the proposed redevelopment?). If community is not aware of the project, what are the plans to involve the community?*

Historic preservation and high-country conservation is a team sport in Ouray County, as evidenced by past successes by TLR, OCHS, the Red Mountain Project, the Ouray Trails Group, and the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership. In many ways, the Idarado Houses project builds on these past efforts.

We have received moral support and a great article in the most recent edition of Shelter Magazine, a publication of Telluride Newspapers, and had communications with the Ouray Plaindealer and the Silverton Standard regarding this project. We have enjoyed positive coverage from these local media outlets on other projects in the past and expect to continue our positive relationship going forward. Once we have a deal going forward that we can announce, we expect great enthusiasm from our supporters, the public, the business community, and our local government representatives.

*Identify cleanup-funding sources (i.e., direct or leveraging of funds and availability of financial incentives such as TIF's).*

TLR and OCHS have previewed the project for our local History Colorado staffer based in Durango. Bringing the Idarado Houses into public ownership will make them eligible for State Historic Society funding, which we intend to apply. Given the historical significance, and being that the State Historical Society has already invested in an engineering assessment of the houses, we feel good about our chances.

*Describe redevelopment plans (i.e. the desired future use of the site, the likelihood of redevelopment, and how the site fits within overall redevelopment plans).*

As described above, the re-use goal is to promote history-based tourism and passive viewing of the houses by the public. Public ownership will also provide eligibility for State Historical Fund and other grants not available to the current owner.

The management plan, like other management plans TLR and OCHS have prepared for other sites owned by Ouray County, will include preservation, interpretation and people-management objectives. Like other publicly-owned historic structures in Ouray and San Juan Counties, the number one TLR and OCHS is to stabilize the houses in a manner that protects the houses from further deterioration, which often includes re-roofing, and redirecting drainage away from the foundations. Next steps are to install lexan/plexiglass in the window –openings; install doors in the door openings; clean out and strip insides down to their bare, wooden-board walls; remove trash and debris from the outside; and place interpretive signing. Experience has shown that providing interpretive signage and not-locking doors helps lead to less vandalism.

*List any commitments in place that provide evidence that this brownfields or voluntary cleanup site will be cleaned up and redeveloped, and is capable of becoming an operating business that provides jobs for the community or will become an asset to the community.*

See above

## **6. Benefits**

*Explain how site revitalization will serve to spur further beneficial activities at nearby locations.*

*Describe how site redevelopment will benefit the community.*

The stabilization and preservation of the Idarado Houses reaffirms the citizens of Ouray County's commitment to honoring its mining heritage and the people who led the European-dominated settlement of the west. Preserving elements of its mining past is a part of our identity and a source of pride for most that live here. This project contributes to history-based tourism in the San Juans, teaches us about our past, rounds out the visitor experience, and contributes to the popularity and economic health of our region.

*State whether a direct health environmental threat will be mitigated.*

A TBA for Asbestos Containing Materials and Lead Based Paint will dictate the current environmental conditions of the site and if remediation is required. Removing asbestos, if found, properly, will be critical as an element of cleaning up the buildings. How to mitigate lead-based paint, if found, will be a risk-based decision, that we will want to consult with CDPHE as to how best to accomplish, given the intended use of the buildings.