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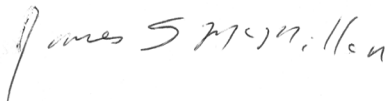
Dear Sir,

This is a letter to the editor, Leadville Herald Democrat, published in the September 16, 2021 issue. It concerns the Union Milling application (now called CJK Milling).

We live just downstream from the mill site. The California Gulch stream runs through our property. This letter is about ground and surface water, the Arkansas River, and the EPA.

Sincerely,

Jim McMillen

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James S. McMillen". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Union Mining

I would like to add my voice to the gathering storm of protest over the proposed permitting of Union Milling.

Union Mill owners are seeking a permit to process large amounts of mine tailings, up to 80 truck loads a day right through town, to a location next to the water treatment plant, which is about four miles south of town on highway 24.

According to the permit application, this is a cyanide leaching operation. Cyanide and other chemicals are needed in big quantities for chemical leaching of 80 truck loads a day. Other speculators around Colorado will be trucking their mine tailings here because it is almost impossible to find communities who will permit such volumes of toxic chemicals in their own backyard. The physical plant is here and has been here since back in the day when “environment” was not in anybody’s vocabulary.

The ground water, or water table, is very close to the surface in this area. When our well was drilled we hit water at 30 feet, and water gushed out, creating a small stream across our property until it was capped.

The Union Mill location is in an extremely sensitive area considering the shallow water table. If one tried real hard, one could not think of a worse spot for this type of operation which is almost inevitably prone to chemical spills or undiscovered leakage into the ground water. What if an accident happens is a question that predicts the future all too often.

The Arkansas River headwaters are closely linked to the ground water and a network of tributaries in Lake County, including California Gulch stream, which flows near highway 24. The water treatment plant discharges Leadville’s treated water into California Gulch stream, and the Union Mill site is right next to the water treatment plant. It could not be a worse situation if somebody planned it that way.

Long hamstrung by residual heavy metals in our mining heritage, few trout in the Arkansas River were able to live more than three years, according to Greg Felt, co-owner and guide at ArkAnglers, with over 30 years experience pursuing trout of the Arkansas River. Now, after the EPA Superfund cleanup in the 1990’s, the lifespan of brown trout and rainbow has tripled, wrote Felt, and bio-diversity flourishes in a river of healthy fish. Long a third-tier Colorado fishing destination, the Arkansas River is now the state’s most popular fishery.

This remarkable turn-around could be threatened by chemical leakage at a very sensitive ground water site, giving the river habitat once again a taste of Leadville’s toxic pollution, which is supposed to be a thing of the past. Say “hell no” to Union Milling taking a terrible risk with our environment!

I read the front page story in the September 2nd issue, and am very appreciative of news of \$7.5million in state funds possibly available for further remediation to protect the river’s watershed. There were five state and regional organizations represented in a tour of nearby river habitat, with local people participating. It is very gratifying to learn about the work of these dedicated people, but in terms of immediate threats, the Union Mill is the elephant in the living room.

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