

Golden Opportunity for Abandoned Gold Mines In Nevada City

From <http://www.epa.gov/region9/waste/features/nevada-city/index.html>

Region IX EPA

Text of video:

Narrator: "EPA Region 9 is working with Nevada City, California, to assess five abandoned gold mining sites. Nevada City and its project partners, the Friends of Deer Creek, intend to create trail systems and recreational opportunities here. But before they can promote these areas for public use, they must assess these sites for the health risks posed by mercury, arsenic, and other toxic chemicals, which are the unfortunate legacy of California's gold mines."

Ball Falconi, City Engineer: "These grounds have been sitting literally vacant since 1880, so around 130 years. So that's why you see that that [sic] nature has kinda taken it over."

Narrator: "Hydraulic mining started here in the 1850s. It directed water through high-pressure water cannons to blast away the mountainsides, disintegrating the landscape into tons of gravel debris."

Ball Falconi, City Engineer: "And that's why this was kinda a natural to become city property because it just sat here, nobody wanted to try and fool with this kind of terrain to try to build on it, just look at it."

Narrator: "Mining introduced toxic chemicals like mercury and arsenic to extract the gold from the landscape. These toxic materials are still pervasive in the local environment."

Sol Henson, Friends of Deer Creek: "If you see a miner that's gold panning, for any gold that they find, they're finding almost an equal amount of mercury."

Narrator: "To assess risks to human health and the environment, EPA is providing Brownfields funding and technical assistance. EPA conducted split sampling to evaluate proposed sampling methods and helped design a randomized sampling plan. Using historic lithographs, the Friends of Deer Creek has located the old mining infrastructure to help determine where to sample the area for contaminants."

Carrie Monohan, Senior River Scientist/Hydrogeologist: The Brownfields grant has given us an opportunity to assess abandoned mine lands that would have otherwise have gone unassessed. And without that information we would not know about the potential for exposure, either to people using those areas for recreation, as they are, or the potential for those sites to contaminate other areas of the watershed."

Narrator: "EPA's Brownfields program will continue to guide assessment and cleanup work here into the future."