

# ROCKY FLATS STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

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City of Golden ~ City of Northglenn ~ City of Thornton ~ City of Westminster ~ Town of Superior  
League of Women Voters ~ Rocky Flats Cold War Museum ~ Rocky Flats Homesteaders

## Monthly Status Report – August 2017

### **Board Meeting Summary**

There was no meeting this month.

### **Legacy Management Monthly Site Activities Summary**

DOE reports site personnel conducted the following activities in July.

#### Groundwater Treatment Systems

- East Trenches Plume Treatment System (ETPTS): DOE reports the system, which also treats contaminated water that was previously treated by the Mound Site Plume Treatment System, is working as designed.
- Solar Ponds Plume Treatment System (SPPTS): DOE reports the system is working as designed. Uranium treatment testing using microcells is ongoing. The latest microcell treated uranium to below the site-specific standard for 1 month, then was replaced with a new microcell.

#### North Walnut Creek Slump

- Developed new geoprobe wells/piezometers at the North Walnut Creek slump area and the Original Landfill (OLF).
- Sampled the North Walnut Creek slump area wells.
- Discovered a 440-foot-long crack on the North Walnut Creek slump area hillside on July 17<sup>th</sup>. The crack formed approximately 1 month after the short-term maintenance to regrade the hillside. The width of the crack ranged from less than 1 inch to 3 inches, with no vertical displacement. Its maximum depth was approximately 2 feet. The crack location was plotted and it follows the same line as the original slump. The crack will be filled to reduce precipitation infiltration.

#### Ecology

- Conducted erosion control and wetland water level surveys.
- Began photo-point monitoring for Preble's mouse monitoring locations.

#### Uranium Geochemistry Evaluation

- Finalized and shipped the third batch of samples for uranium isotopic analysis by the University of California Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory to determine the relative percentages of natural vs man-made uranium in North Walnut Creek surface water.

### East Trenches Depressions

- Placed imported fill on shallow depressions at East Trenches T-5, T-8, and T-11 to reduce precipitation inflation.

### Roads

- Applied dust suppressant (Durablend) to the main access roads at the Site.

### **Stewardship Council Membership Applications**

Applications are now being accepted for the four community representatives' seats on the Board of Directors. The two-year terms begin February 2018. The Stewardship Council member governments will conduct interviews on Monday morning, October 30, 2017. **Applications are due Thursday, October 5, 2017.**

The application and additional information can be found at: <http://www.rockyflatssc.org/new-member.html>

**KUNC: "Proposed Rocky Flats Visitor's Center Renews Debate Over What To Do With Former Nuclear Site"**  
<http://www.kunc.org/post/proposed-rocky-flats-visitor-s-center-renews-debate-over-what-do-former-nuclear-site>

### TRANSCRIPT

Kyra Buckley, August 17, 2017

Building a visitor center at a wildlife refuge doesn't sound controversial. But when that refuge is on the site of the security buffer zone of a former nuclear weapons facility, it gets complicated quickly. Unless a federal court intervenes, a visitor center will open at the Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge in Golden in the summer of 2018.

For more than 20 years, Rocky Flats was where Department of Energy contractors manufactured plutonium triggers for thermonuclear bombs. After it closed in the early 1990s, it went through a decade long, multi-billion dollar cleanup. Three government agencies have deemed the area safe and it has been recognized as a protected wildlife refuge. Former FBI agent Jon Lipsky does not think that cleanup was sufficient.

"I don't believe the cleanup was conducted even to the specifications of what the government wanted," Lipsky says. "Numbers lie and liars figure. I'm not afraid to say it -- it was all cherry picked, the sampling."

In 1989 Lipsky and members of the Environmental Protection Agency raided Rocky Flats for suspected violations of environmental law. It was the first time a federal agency--or in this case, two federal agencies--raided another.

However, David Abelson has a different take on things. He worked on policy regarding the site in 1995. "When you look at the initial soil cleanup levels for plutonium when we started and where we ended up," Abelson says, "it is a stunning change, and a positive change, from where the agencies were in 1995 to where they ended up in 2005."

Abelson is now the executive director of the Rocky Flats Stewardship Council. He closely watched the cleanup process as a congressional staffer for Colorado U.S. Rep. David Skaggs, and then as executive director for a coalition of local governments surrounding Rocky Flats. He says after figuring out how to clean up the area, the conversation shifted to what to do with the former nuclear site.

“This gets to the question of the refuge, which guarantees ongoing federal ownership--you can't have a local government assume ownership of that land, you protect the land for its natural habitat,” Abelson says. “That protection, the establishment of the refuge as a national wildlife refuge, is part of the fabric of this community and what we would like here, what we would prefer here, what our economy can support, and the values--and that's open space, open space is incredibly powerful and incredibly important to our communities. Rocky Flats fits within that framework: Federal ownership, but land protected for its natural values.”

The U.S. Congress passed a law in 2001 protecting Rocky Flats as a national wildlife refuge, and while elk, deer, and Preble's Meadow jumping mice have free reign at the site, it is only open to the public through guided tours.

Lipsky believes it shouldn't be open to the public at all.

With his support, five groups are suing the Fish and Wildlife Service over the center: the Rocky Mountain Peace & Justice Center, Candelas Glows/Rocky Flats Glows, Rocky Flats Right to Know, Rocky Flats Neighborhood Association and the Environmental Information Network (EIN) Inc. They have asked a federal judge to halt building on the site, claiming it is not safe for public access. They say more testing needs to be done -- and Lipsky doubts the government's claims that the area is safe.

“They're disregarding the science,” he says. “Now, the Department of Energy controls the variegated science at Rocky Flats. But when they start trying to convince other people--and there are experts in this world that say that even the respirable dust of plutonium are dangerous, fatal. It can cause problems with DNA, so your children might survive it, but you might have grandchildren that are messed up. So how is it safe?”

David Abelson says while there is an increased cancer risk--a less than 0.0001 percent increase according to government data--people can make their own decision on whether or not to visit the site. “Everybody should be naturally skeptical, when it comes to a nuclear weapons facility, about the data,” Abelson says. “But what you see over time and what you see over the years through multiple parties within government and outside of government looking at the data and reaching the same conclusion, that over time what you realize is that there's enough perimeters around the gathering of data, that you can trust it. But it takes a long time to get there, and naturally so.”

The Department of Energy still runs the most contaminated inner part of the site, known as the Central Operable Unit, which will not open to the public. Federal law requires a review of that site every five years, and the most recent one was August 2017. It says precautions put in place after the cleanup are protecting people and the environment.

The state of Colorado also has regulatory and some oversight authority over the site. “Rocky Flats underwent an extensive cleanup,” says Lindsay Masters with the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment. “Three different government agencies supervised it.” She also says the cleanup decisions were subject to rigorous public participation.

“Ultimately the findings of the environmental investigation led to the conclusion that offsite areas and refuge lands were suitable for any type of use--refuge, residential,” Masters says about the initial cleanup that wrapped up in 2005. “There is residual contamination in the Central Operable Unit, and agencies have not walked away from their responsibility to oversee that.”

But Lipsky says after the environmental violations he investigated before the 1989 raid, people should not be enticed to a visitor’s center at Rocky Flats. He says it “really sticks in his craw” what the government has done with regards to Rocky Flats.

“It’s going to take everybody, as it always does, being aware of the issue, looking into it--sorry this is so complex, but it is--and making the decision, and then speaking up,” he says. “And we’ll negate the science the government is coming up with with.”

The groups seeking to stop the building of the visitor center were dealt a blow in June when a federal judge said their filing was premature because work won’t begin until next year. They have asked that district court judge to reconsider her decision and are waiting to hear back. If the judge still denies the preliminary injunction, the groups plan to appeal to the 10th Circuit Court.

#### **Stewardship Council Update**

Upcoming 2017 Board meetings: September 11, October 30