

Year 2000 and 2001 Priority Actions

Clear Lake Upper Watershed Mercury Remediation Actions - 22

1. General Description of the Action

Divert Storm water around waste rock piles and retort area and revegetate impacted areas to reduce mercury loading to the lake and reduce the health threat to the Elem tribe.

Mercury contamination of fish in Clear Lake constitutes a health threat to humans. Mercury is a conservative neurotoxin that bioconcentrates through the food web. There is a mercury mine that continues to contribute mercury to Clear Lake. The Sulfur Bank Mine is in need of reclamation to reduce its effect on Clear Lake and to reduce the health impacts it has on a Elem Indian tribe adjacent to the abandoned mine.

Waste rock piles emit some mercury through the air which is eventually deposited and later carried away by stormwater. The mercury laden dust impacts the Elem Reservation adjacent the mine. Reclamation of waste rock piles would reduce the impacts from the piles.

The mine continues to contribute mercury in the lake whenever it rains through surface water run-on and run-off of the waste piles. If stormwater could be diverted to preclude stormwater from running through the waste site, a portion of the mercury could be eliminated from entering the delta.

Mercury removal is proposed to benefit the ecosystem and public health.

2. Cost Estimates

Although many millions of dollars can be spent on these activities, a cap of **one million dollars** per year for early remediation is recommended to reduce the risk to the Elem population. Funding for this project would cease after Surperfund work begins.

Limited CALFED staff involvement would be necessary. CALFED staff would attend remediation meetings as a stakeholder. Most of what needs to be done has been discussed by a stakeholder group.

3. Program Administration and Governance

The CALFED Water Quality Program should oversee the coordination of agencies and approval of funds spent. Contracts for work should be let through the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service should be a Federal agency that could let contracts in lieu of a State Agency.

4. Program Coordination

The Department of Conservation has a Mine Reclamation unit that coordinates with owners and could provide some expertise in reclamation of the waste rock piles.

The Regional Water Board or the Department of Water Resources could design and implement a stormwater diversion system.

These activities or similar activities will take place at the site sometime in the future through the US EPA. Exact activities and approximate dates are not yet available. The EPA has been through a few iterations of this remedial process over the last ten years.

CALFED's actions would complement the eventual activities of the other agencies. In Effect CALFED would be providing earlier protection for the persons living near the mine and mercury loadings in the watershed would be immediately decreased.

5. Schedule

Waste rock reclamation work is ready to begin and is awaiting funding. The site is characterized well enough to begin stormwater diversion around waste rock piles.

Work could extend into the future for a few years, doing revegetation of waste rock piles and retort areas, until the EPA funds Superfund work to complete the remedial process. Our objective is to eliminate some initial threat regardless of when the EPA gets the funding to begin, which could be several years from now.