

# PSA



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Animas River Spring Runoff Update**

With unseasonably warm weather throughout the month of February and forecasted into March, snow has begun melting at lower elevations in the San Juan Mountains. This has increased river flows throughout the Animas River watershed. As water levels rise, sediments deposited during the Gold King Mine Incident as well as sediment deposited over the course of many decades will be stirred up from the riverbed causing turbidity (a cloudy, murky appearance), and a possible change in color.

Every spring, the Animas River experiences runoff with naturally occurring sediments. Many of these sediments originate in the upper Animas Mining District and are naturally high in certain heavy metals. The Gold King Mine Incident transported additional sediment, some of which accumulated along the banks and bed of the Animas River within Colorado. Sediment left behind from the Gold King Mine has a noticeable yellow-orange color but is otherwise similar to the naturally occurring sediment that is present every spring as water levels rise. Exposure to both water and sediment is not expected to harm human health during typical recreational exposure.

#### Tips for River Users:

- It is always a good public health practice to wash with soap and water after exposure to untreated river water or sediment.
- As a precautionary measure, it is recommended that river users avoid extended contact with visibly discolored sediment or river water.
- Because children sometimes ingest water and soil when playing in or around the river, they should be supervised closely to limit their exposure to untreated water or sediments.
- When using any river or stream as water source be sure to properly treat water before consumption.
- Rinsing fishing and boating equipment after each use is always a good practice.

San Juan Basin Health advises the public to avoid areas with orange sediment or discolored standing water. Further, anyone coming in contact with any orange sediment or discolored standing water should wash with soap and water. Regular monitoring of river conditions will occur throughout the spring. SJBH, in conjunction with state and local partners, is finalizing monitoring and notification plans, with the goal of increased education and information to better protect public health. SJBH will provide updated guidance as conditions change.

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