EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

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Frequently Asked Questions: The Groundwater Collection System for the CDA Basin Cleanup

Why is EPA building a Groundwater Collection System in Kellogg?

The Groundwater Collection System will help reduce zinc pollution in the South Fork of the Coeur d' Alene River. The system will capture the biggest single source of dissolved zinc pollution to the South Fork – up to 400 pounds a day! It is EPA's responsibility under Superfund law to address zinc and other heavy metals from historical mine disposal practices. This cleanup action was selected by EPA in 2012 with concurrence from the State of Idaho and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe.

Will removing zinc from the South Fork affect Lake Coeur d'Alene water quality?

EPA does not expect this action alone to significantly impact the water quality in the lake. Lake Coeur d'Alene (often referred to as Idaho's Gem) attracts many people to recreate on it and in it, and live along its shores. It contains about 75 million tons of sediments contaminated with heavy metals from historical mining practices upstream. These sediments have been washed into the lake bed by the Coeur d'Alene River. The lake is a long way -- about 45 river miles -- from the Groundwater Collection System. There are many other sources of zinc along that journey. The proportion of zinc that flows into Lake Coeur d'Alene every year is about 5 times the amount that will be trapped by the Groundwater Collection System. Therefore, the Groundwater Collection System is not expected to significantly impact water quality in the lake.

Why doesn't EPA do something about contaminated sediments in Lake Coeur d'Alene?

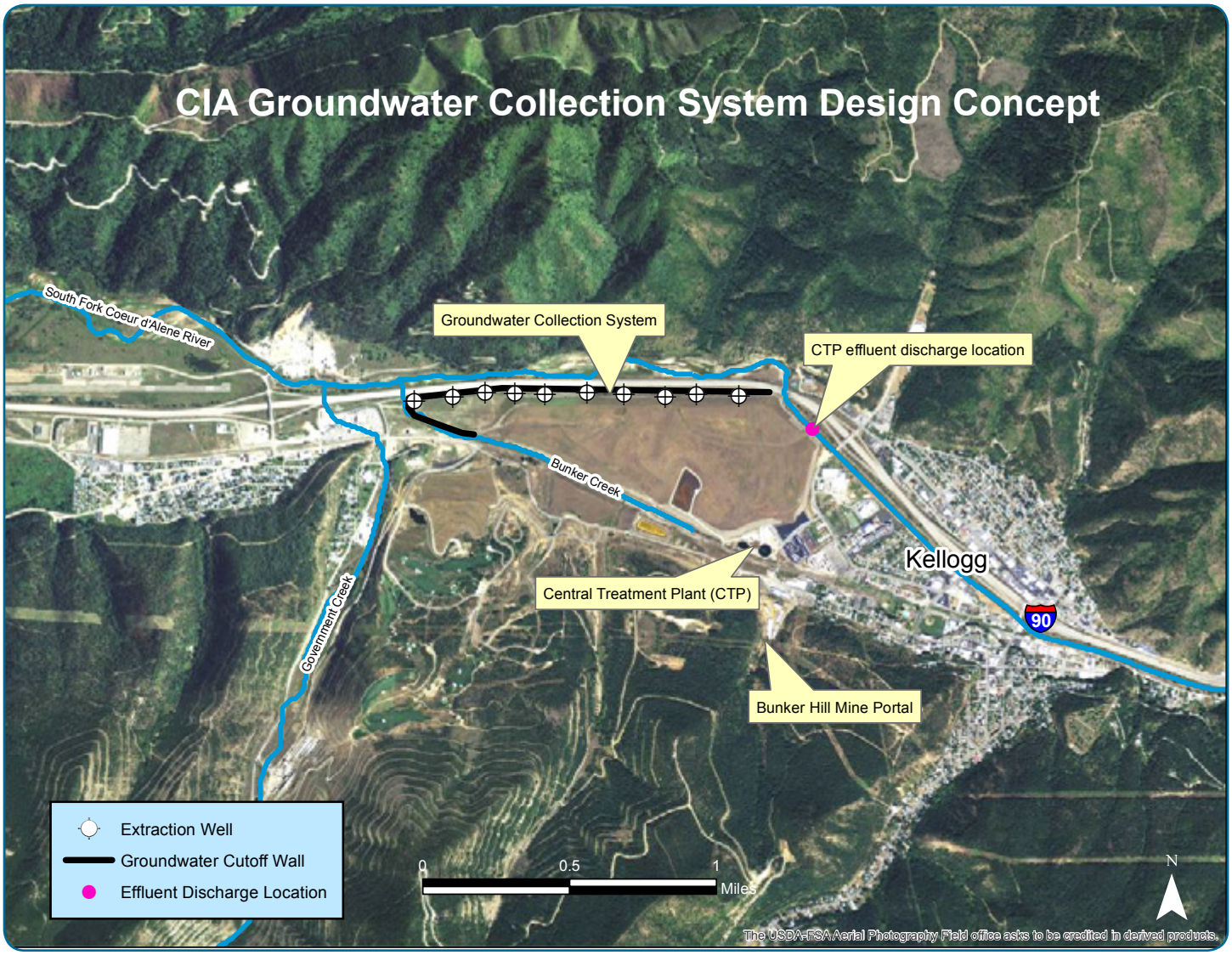
When EPA issued its 2002 Record of Decision (the document that selects the cleanup actions), the community strongly opposed any EPA action in Lake Coeur d'Alene. Instead, a Lake Management Plan administered by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe was determined to be an alternative to EPA performing cleanup actions. The purpose of the management plan is to manage the contaminants in the lake bed. A critical portion of that effort is to prevent nutrients from overloading the lake in a complex chain reaction. Such a reaction could potentially cause the metals in the bed to dissolve and flow into the water above. The metals, if released from the bed in a large enough volume, could be toxic to the ecosystem.

What will EPA do with water it collects from the Groundwater Collection System?

The water captured by the Groundwater Collection System will be piped to the Central Treatment Plant in Kellogg. There, it will be treated to meet water quality standards and then discharged back to the South Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River.

What is the Central Treatment Plant?

The Central Treatment Plant or CTP is the industrial water treatment plant originally constructed in 1974 by the Bunker Hill Company. It still treats two million gallons per day of acid mine drainage from the Bunker Hill Mine. The CTP will be upgraded with modern, reliable equipment. Its original parts are worn out. This upgrade will happen during construction of the Groundwater Collection System so that the CTP is ready to treat the groundwater and the acid mine drainage at the same time.



What can I do?

You can help protect the water quality of the Coeur d'Alene River and Lake Coeur d'Alene. Reduce your use of fertilizers which can harm water quality. Also, when working on projects that move dirt, make sure soil and sediments are not released into the water. Sediments along the Coeur d'Alene River typically contain heavy metals and nutrients. Keeping sediments and nutrients out of the water is one of the keys to protecting Lake Coeur d'Alene.

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