

# Summitville TAG

By Wendy Mellott

As the Summitville Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) approaches its third year as "watch dogs" to the Summitville clean-up process, it's time to emphasize some of the issues with which the TAG group has had success. Although a great deal of media attention has been directed toward costly expenditures, alleged improper practices by contractors and procedural flaws, TAG continues to move in a positive direction, indicating to EPA and the State what are perceived to be solutions to problems.

Last year the UAA (Use Attainability Assessment) was released. The UAA "rates" the water quality of a river. After careful review by our Technical Advisors, the UAA became a major concern of the TAG Group. The State of Colorado, having sponsored the study, concluded that certain segments of the Alamosa river should be downgraded or temporarily modified because of naturally occurring conditions. The manner in which the State's conclusions were drawn came under close scrutiny not only by the



TAG Group, but also by other organizations. Comments were submitted.

Our concerns were confirmed by the EPA when they decided to go a step further and hire another contractor to conduct further analysis. This contractor was hired to calculate metal loadings that existed in the Alamosa River and Wightman Fork at several locations for each of two previous time periods: pre-Galactic (1986) and pre-mining (estimates made by hypothesis), based on existing data and existing models. The objective of this study was to determine the impact of mining activities on the Alamosa River and

Wightman Fork because the previous attempts were found to have assumptions and approaches that lead to inadequate modeling. A new modeling effort is underway because an EPA Superfund Report condemned the states modeling.

The Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) was to conduct a hearing in November 1996 to review the states recommendations on the UAA but postponed the hearing until August of 1997 in light of the additional study being conducted. The TAG Group regarded this as a major triumph because metal loadings (pre-Galactic and pre-mining) are now being taken more seriously and extra time is being given to TAG Technical Advisors to continue their review of the UAA. Additionally, an aquatic biologist will be hired to examine the study.

The long range goal of community members is to study the Alamosa River thoroughly and gather enough evidence to form a viable and practical determination of how the river can be restored.

Alone the Summitville TAG does not have enough

data, manpower or money to make this determination on their own, therefore, another group has been organized from where the TAG's capabilities are limited. This new groups official name is **Restore Our Alamosa River (ROAR)**. Using financial help from the Alamosa/La Jara Conservancy District and legal expertise from the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, ROAR is underway and a grant writer has been hired. Valle del Sol or Capulin Community Center will be the non-profit recipient and administrator of the grants. To date, there have been approximately 19 foundations located for submission of grant proposals. TAG will be a vital information repository for ROAR and has already been instrumental in the grant writing process.

Once grant money is received, ROAR plans to hire technical expertise to conduct thorough studies of the river to be in a position to make the most qualified assessment of the problem. If findings do prove that downgrading is the only alternative to the Alamosa River problem, at least everyone concerned will feel as

though all efforts have been expended. This much is owed to the future generations who will be left with the results of the Summitville Mine.

EPA has also been in the process of hiring a Facilitator to mediate differing opinions about the clean up process as they arise. This is a win-win situation because all interested parties will be able to come to the table with their concerns, be heard, and hopefully come to a resolution with issues concerning the Summitville Superfund Site.

In the short-term, heavy snowfall and potentially harmful spring run-off will be the primary focus of the TAG Group. Jeff Stern, Technical Advisor for the TAG, will be doing frequent articles in the Valley Courier to keep the information flow as current as possible.

Your opinions do matter, we encourage everyone to stay involved in the Summitville Superfund Project. If you have any concerns, please feel free to contact me at 657-2881.

*Wendy Mellott lives in Del Norte and is the TAG Administrator/Coordinator.*