



**Agricultural Producers Working Group
Agenda
Thursday, February 2, 2023
1:30-3:30PM**

Time: 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Contact: Brenda Hunt, 775.877.9005, brenda@cwsd.org

Location: Meeting will be hybrid, held both in person and over Zoom.

Agenda Items

1. **Welcome**
2. **(Time Certain 1:35pm) Carson River Mercury Site Overview and Update (Andy Bain, USEPA/Dave Friedman, NDEP)**

Andy Bain, Project Manager for EPA Operable Unit 2 (the river portion of the mercury site), Mohamed Ibrahim from EPA Operable Unit 1 (the upland and mill site portion of the mercury site), and Dave Friedman (from NDEP out of Carson City) presented an overview of the Carson River Mercury site. Dave has been working on the Carson River mercury site since 2009 and Andy since 2013. They are investigating the nature and extent of the mercury contamination resulting from the Comstock boom. The collaboration is continuing to work on the interim Record of Decision as to the proposed plan for addressing the contamination, and Andy thanked meeting attendees who provided comments.

Directions to get to information:

[Epa.gov/superfund/carsonrivermercury](https://epa.gov/superfund/carsonrivermercury). From there click the storymap link, which includes GIS coverage and historic and current photos of the site. Operable Unit 2 Area goes from Mexican Dam to Stillwater and Fallon wildlife refuges (the terminal wetlands and includes Washoe Lake). Operable Unit 1 incorporates the source area, which includes 236 mill sites, including Virginia City, Dayton, and the Brunswick Canyon section of Carson City. There are also several mill sites near Washoe Lake, but Andy acknowledged that was not within CWSD's scope.

Users can look up a specific address and can check for overlap with properties they may be interested in. The tool includes new construction in the source area (Operable Unit 1), where there is a long-term sampling response plan, a "cookbook" for determining if the property overlaps with the Superfund site. The EPA has investigation boundaries – the maps are the best estimation of where contamination might be, but it's not the ultimate word. When people have questions, call Dave and Julia from NDEP, because they are the local word on whether there is cadmium, mercury or lead contamination.

The Map Explorer (tab onscreen) contains more than 30,000 data points encompassing more than 30 years of investigations, which culminates in the proposed plan that was issued the end of Sept. 2021; as of the meeting date the EPA was still reviewing comments. The original comment period was extended at the request of CWSD and others so that people could pull together their questions. Comments were submitted by

The issue potentially is the river itself, the Lahontan Reservoir, and to a lesser extent possibly the ditches and canals below the dam. He recognizes the high number of miles within the Carson-Tahoe irrigation district. The team hopes to implement the following: during ditch maintenance, casting

excavated soil adjacent to the ditch to avoid spreading mercury further afield (a standard operating procedure, to continue to build the berm of the ditch). Using old USGS topo maps from 1900, the team sampled down along St. Clair Road where the old Carson River branch used to run, and they found high levels of mercury in what would have been the historic river channel. Prior to the dam being built, the mercury-contaminated sediment was clearly able to be carried down to Stillwater (Carson Lake and Carson Sink). What he hopes is that by using historic information be able to flag inquiries so if anyone needs to dig in a potentially contaminated area, together they can work to take appropriate measures that avoid spreading mercury contamination around.

Andy said they have a good handle on the types of places where the mercury might settle, but there were some surprises downriver; a lot of mercury sequestered in older deposits, such as the delta area, where mercury is in the banks. Heard from a lot of constituents as to the ability to do bank restoration work and why wasn't the EPA offering to do that. The EPA isn't precluding other organizations from taking on work there. The EPA is clarifying with FEMA what their respective roles are and making sure they (EPA) aren't getting in the way of applying the sampling and analysis plan. Andy opened up the floor to questions.

Brenda clarified that the mercury site starts at the Mexican Dam around the Morgan Mill area and continues all the way to the Carson Sink and also impacts areas in Little and Big Washoe Lakes, thus impacting a large percentage but not the entire watershed. Dave pointed out that the reason the Mexican Dam is included is because mills within the Empire settlement contaminated the area by using a mercury amalgamation process.

Nik expressed concern for groundwater. Andy said a number of surveys throughout the basin by their tribal office, drinking water programs and USGS did not find any mercury of significance in the drinking water systems. Mercury tends to bind to sediments; much of it is trapped in the Lahontan Reservoir, which appears to be a sink for the mercury. The USGS estimates upwards of 90 percent of the mercury is bound to the sediments in the dam. EPA has done a number of studies as part of their remedial investigation feasibility study, including in Lahontan reservoir. They looked at total mercury as well as the amount of methyl mercury. Methyl mercury is highly toxic in terms of fish and wildlife consumption, yet it's not a significant factor in below-the-dam impacts. In terms of incidental ingestion of surface water, they are not seeing a concern, but they wouldn't want people drinking the surface water without it being treated. The affected area is from the mill sites and down.

NDOW fish consumption advisories do exist in the Upper Carson, but neither Andy nor Dave think they're for mercury. However, Dave doesn't think he's seen fish tissue analyses containing arsenic from the Leviathan Mine either, and there don't seem to be trout advisories. Concerned parties can go to NDOW for data. Any stocked trout during spring runoff gets fished out or the survivors don't last through the hot summer.

Brenda: We need to move on to stick to the agenda, but if anyone has additional questions they can put them in the chat or contact Andy and Dave directly. She thanked them for coming and confirmed that by Upper Watershed they meant the East Fork and the West Fork, and that the West Fork trout are fine. Brenda mentioned a Channel 2 investigative report that was just posted on YouTube that's good but does contain a couple inaccuracies.

- 3. (1:50 – 2:20pm) Participant introductions round robin on any issues, events or things you're working on you'd like to share with the group. (New processes, new programs, new equipment, etc.)**

Brenda Hunt, CWSD Watershed Program Manager

Rachel Kieffer, Alpine Watershed Group: Not a lot of updates. They do have on the calendar May 9 a presentation by Ryan Morgan, who works on Avery Hellman's farm, regarding the data they've collected. They haven't made the reservation yet but they're looking at 5:30 Turtle Rock Park with a Zoom option.

Chuck Schembre, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection's nonpoint source program: Announced his leaving to work with Understanding Ag, but he will remain in the area and hopes to continue working with the group as well as bring in more resources for Regenerative Ag to the watershed. Nothing to announce, but if there are questions regarding 319 funding people can check in with him.

Nik Neumann, Wild Harmony Ranch: Weather has slowed things down, but he's going to try and get the seeder out to seed in ground in snow before the snow melts out. Lost tonnage from the overtopping of Henningson Ditch. Trying to figure out a preparedness plan and an earth working project to stop future erosion.

Jessica Gwerder, district conservationist at the Minden NRCS field office: There are opportunities for signing up for money that she'll report on later in the meeting. Suggested that Nik contact her because there may be a fit for his situation.

Ed Kleiner, Owner, Comstock Seed: Will be working with Chuck on a 20-acre crop seeding into old pastures to try and build up soil quality there. Earlier this season went up to the Leviathan site with Nevada Environmental Group. He plans to implement more off-grid solar power on his farm. He recently got an old windmill back running, has a meter on it, and he'll be using it for gravity-dripping to add a few more woody plants around the windmill to support habitat through the summer heat when irrigation ends. Like Nik, he's hoping to seed as soon as possible, and they may run a drill.

Lori Leonard, The Nature Conservancy at River Fork Ranch: Later this spring a science speaker series on the fourth Thursday of the month will start in March. The first speaker will be Dr. Laurel Saito of TNC, and she'll be speaking about groundwater. Will start a volunteer docent program in April. She asked for attendees to let people who might be interested know; it's a way to get involved, and docents will also be able to influence some of the programs TNC hosts. They welcome ideas, and she'll pass along information about that to CWSD to disperse. She added it's great to hear that attendees are looking into inter-seeding, which TNC is adopting for one of their fields at River Fork. She'll probably be reaching out for different seed suggestions to try in different spots to see how they do. Doesn't know if they'll be seeding for grazing this spring, it will be more like this fall.

Joe Frey, Frey Ranch: Not a lot going on currently. All cover crops were planted in the fall; the seeding wasn't irrigated but with all the moisture has started to bring it to the surface or just under the surface. Has planted a lot of native grass seed in areas severely affected by drought over the last few years. Original intention was just to cover the soil, but now looking at a 100-percent allocation this coming year he may harvest the seed or inter-seed with other seed. Also looking at taking some native seed down to the riparian areas and plant along the riverbank to get some germination, Johnny Appleseed style.

Carson Hicks, Planner in the Minden NRCS office: Here to talk about NRCS funding opportunities as well as some general information about their programs.

Russell Wilhelm, Seed Program Manager for NDA: Launching program statewide that focuses on native seed and alternative crop development in support of wildfire relief, watershed restoration, and riparian management efforts. Launched their Foundation Seed program Fall 2022 and will be releasing a Request for Application for prospective producers for this spring; eligible recipients will receive seed pro bono. NDA has

multiple varieties and/or species from collected and/or produced seed stock available. Interested parties should contact him. The Nevada Native Seed Forum is coming up in Elko April 11 and 12.

There are a few qualifiers to meet before being deemed eligible to receive seed. Once eligible, NDA will issue that seed to the producer based on the parameters set forth. So, if they say it's a five-acre plot, they must seed that five-acre plot. The plot must be certified by NDA as either source-identified seed and/or actual designated certified seed stock. Applicants will have to go through a seed certification process and must give a portion back to the Foundation Seed Program. After that they can do whatever they want with the seed. Seed is targeted for restorative purposes, not cover crops, although that might be possible in the future. Right now, this program is majorly funded by the BLM, NDOW and NDA, so really the main focus is native seed use for wildfire relief efforts.

Jake Dick, Noxious Weed Program, NDA: We're just busy planning a lot of education and outreach activities right now. A lot of my focus is going on to the statewide early detection rapid response meeting and then we're going to be breaking up some regional meetings this month as well. I think we're doing our Western regional meeting for the EDRR, early detection rapid response group on Feb. 27th, and the state meeting is where we're going to discuss and look at the list and just revisit the state plan with a lot of state agencies, federal agencies and travel partners on the 22nd. I did just release an RFP for noxious weed treatments with an EDRR focus. It's a small amount of funding but we hope to bring more funding. This came from the infrastructure bill funding. We have about \$9K that we just released. It's really targeting conservation districts, noxious weed districts, and CWMAs. We're having the National Invasive Species Awareness Week is happening this month. We're doing a training on our EDRR listed species and how to report them. That will be in-person at the Sparks office and online if anyone is interested. Just a lot of other trainings coming up that's been keeping us busy, it hasn't been a slow season at all.

Brenda: I know that from CWSD's perspective we always get forgotten because we're this weird regional body, but the Nevada Legislature created us. If we could be a part of that regional/state meeting, I think we'd love an invitation. I'm not sure if we could come, but I think Shane or I might be able to join.

Taylor Holloway, Producer Certificates and Produce Compliance, Food Safety and Health, NDA: Right now we're all working on our producer certificate renewals, mapping out our site visits that are coming up with all our priorities. We're focused on producers from the last three years.

Rich Wilkinson, Carson Valley Conservation District: Pretty much what we've had going on for the last four-six months is river restoration. We had three river projects scheduled this fall and we started two of them. Of the two we have one that's almost 100-percent complete. The one just downstream from that, all the heavy earthwork was completed, and we were about to start our bioengineering when we had all the weather. We do have a third project where we're at a critical point where we want to decide whether to proceed starting it now or pushing it to next fall. That's what we've been working on as far as a conservation district. We do have our tractor and no-till drill that's available. We've had a lot of people calling and scheduling pretty heavy in March and April this spring, mainly for hay. So if you know anyone who would either like to utilize our service or potentially rent out the equipment, they can reach out to me and I'll make sure to post that contact information in the chat. I've had a lot of landowners who have said these flows have been out of bank at least three different times this winter downstream of Genoa Lane. I'm kind of thinking we're going to see some significant flood damage once everything recedes, but that's what we're here for.

Cami Hodges, Hodges Transportation and Break-A-Heart Ranch: I sent our ranch manager out to the Frey Ranch a couple of months ago...we've been trying to learn a lot about regenerative farming. We've had many years of traditional farming and alfalfa for 50-60 years now. We're just trying to see what we can do. We did try triticale in smaller fields in the fall. We'll just be trying to see how that pops up for us here in the spring. Really excited to get to know everyone and see if we can turn our land around a little bit.

Safia Amimi, Climate Resilience Planning, Fallon Pauite-Shoshone Tribe: I'm planning to work on a drought plan and introduce regenerative agriculture to our farmers. I'm hoping to learn about other people in our watershed, what they're doing on their fields. Joe Frey will be happy to help with projects and let her know there will be another workshop.

Kelly Nicholas, CWSD AmeriCorps Watershed Tech: Trying to build social media presence and be an event aggregator for CWSD partners.

4. **(2:20 – 2:50pm) Group Discussion on CRC Agricultural Producers Working Group Next Steps: Purpose, Mission, Vision, Topics, meeting times, etc. (See attached DRAFT for review)**
 - a. Open discussion to obtain feedback on draft mission/purpose, vision and what are the goals and strategies the group would like to explore and achieve. Opportunity for input over the next couple of meetings! Let us know what is missing, what needs changing, etc. We are seeking everyone's input and all perspectives are welcome! The CRC model is a great process to find common ground!

Brenda wanted to get something down on paper as far as a mission statement for everyone to review because it's a brand-new group and this is only the second meeting. We want to elicit people's hopes for this group but acknowledge that it could happen at our next meeting if not a lot of people had looked it over. Chuck suggested focusing on the APWG Mission, Vision, Method, and Goals. This has been worked on slowly for the past year. Suggestions included highlighting pollution, water quality and human health.

Editors Note to help when looking at a Vision vs. a mission statement:

Definition of Vision vs. Mission:

A **vision statement** focuses on tomorrow and what an organization wants to ultimately become, achieve or see. The vision statement is, in a sense, loftier. It outlines the worldview of the organization and [why it exists](#). It attracts people — not just employees but also customers and vendors — who believe in the vision of the organization.

A **mission statement** focuses on what we are doing today, for whom or what, are we working, what is the benefit. The mission statement guides the day-to-day operations and decision-making of the organization. It helps in [tactical planning](#) and "rallying the troops" around a common near- to medium-term goal. The mission statement helps members of the organization get on the same page on what they should do and how they should do it.

Brenda's provided a sample vision statement:

A healthy and vibrant Carson River Watershed, where agricultural lands are thriving and economically viable, capturing and filtering water, and residents appreciate the connection between land, water, food and their health and the health of the watershed.

Editor's Note: Brenda thinks this maybe too long and is mixing vision and mission. She appreciates and welcomes everyone's input and would be open to brainstorming/wordsmithing the vision and mission. These are critical pieces to ensure everyone is on board with the process.

5. **(2:50– 3pm) Clean Water Section 208 Planning Grant – Soil Health and Regenerative Ag Update – The grant goals are to work with this body, identify practices that work in the**

CRW, conduct case studies on a few ranches, and develop/finalize a white paper on best practices with case studies.

CWSD is the Governor's appointed Section 208 planning body for the Carson River Watershed. Every three years CWSD gets \$40K to do a two- to three-year project that affects our water quality based on our 208 plan.

Our water quality plan was developed in 2005 and has a 25-year planning horizon. We decided for this time to conduct a regenerative ag pilot project. The workshop at Frey Ranch in September was a grant task, as is starting the Agricultural Producers Working Group. Another is to write an agricultural best management practices white paper. Hopefully it will have case studies in it; an example is Devere Dressler and Valerie Gordon in Alpine County, who built a bridge over the river so their cattle aren't going through the river when they change fields. The practices they implemented are helping keep the riparian corridor's integrity. The fourth piece is to establish at least three farm demonstration sites in the watershed working with some producers who were either A) implementing regenerative ag soil health practices of some kind or B) somebody who really wanted to pursue that journey that needed some coaching and help, and that they would implement a practice somewhere, probably on a very small scale, and on all of these three properties/ranches/farms we'd collect baseline soil samples: one that is being farmed under a specific practice and one that is being farmed as it has been.

Joe Frey is one of the farms. Another site is the Minor's ranch, but more conversation with the Minors and see if they're comfortable to move forward. And if they're not, that's okay and we'll keep the education going. The third site may be TNC. A vision for Chuck is to have more adaptive/holistic grazing. One of the things we would also share with people: we're using the Haney test through Regen Ag Lab. The Haney Test is something that can be used in the seasonal management of crop fertility, allowing users to understand the potentially available essential nutrients for plants in the growing season from the organic pool; standard soil tests have looked only at the inorganic pool. Measurements will also include wet aggregate stability, an indicator of water infiltration ability and microbial populations. Will need NRSC's assistance with water infiltration rings; Jessica said that would be doable and thought it would be a great collaboration.

Jessica Gwerder: I think that would be fine. Our water filtration rings are temporarily MIA but we do have a soil health test kit that they should be in. We'll find those...I think it would be a great collaboration opportunity,

Chuck: Cami, you had mentioned seeding triticale into your alfalfa...this project in particular gaining as much information from people even though you're just starting that practice, any information we can yield from people is valuable. And you're going to want to do that more than two, three, or four times to get your cover cropping and interseeding practices down. Joe's been doing that...Anyway, Cami, it would be cool to connect with you about what you are doing, even if it's just taking some pictures.

Cami: Yeah, we'd be down to do any of it...sampling, pictures, or whatever. We could take it offline and get a game plan going for what we should be doing once the snow melts here, and go from there.

Chuck: Also for you too, Ed, trying to restore this 20-acre pasture or old hay field...that's what this group can help with. We don't need cutting-edge research, we can just observe and increase the education through observations.

This grant is supposed to be done at the end of June but we're going to ask for an extension of six months, and then continue it through other funding. For questions or interest, e-mail Brenda at brenda@cwdsd.org.

6. **(3:00 – 3:05pm) CWSD Forum (April 18-19 Gov. Mansion/Ruvo Hall, Carson City) and 'Get on the Bus' Watershed Tour (Dates TBD in early June) – Requesting speakers and participants.**

Brenda hopes Nik and Joe could do their Regen Ag presentations for the forum and also soliciting more speakers for both that and for the Get on the Bus tour, which will probably be the second week in June.

7. **(3:05 – 3:20) - Specific funding opportunities, eligibility, criteria and deadlines for NRCS, Department of Agriculture, Western SARE – Would a coordinated approach be possible or interesting? (TBD: Jessica Gwerder, State NRCS staff, NVDA staff, others and CWSD?)**

Jessica Gwerder explained the role of NRCS and its services: providing financial and technical resources, conducting inventory and evaluating resource concerns on properties. Examples can be irrigation efficiency; plant productivity and health; and soil erosion resource concerns. NRCS can help provide alternatives to help address those problems. The overall goal is to work with the owner or operator to develop a conservation plan that includes facilitating practices like those structures for water control, like seeding on the ground, to help facilitate the management practice of that property. That could be prescribed grazing, that could be irrigation water management, etc.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the most popular and most frequently used NRCS conservation program. It incentivizes conservation by providing financial assistance – it is not a grant – and does not pay 100 percent of the amount of what that conservation work may look like. It must be a landowner or operator. Interested lessors need a permission letter from the owner letting NRCS know they can proceed with a project. They can do cooperative contracts between two or more parties when it makes sense (i.e. landowners along a common irrigation ditch). Can also do work with water management entities.

EQIP has continuous signups, but the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) is its own pot of money within EQIP; it provides targeted funding in small watersheds to address impaired water bodies through voluntary conservation. There is \$93,628 available for these four watersheds: Brockliss Slough, Lower West Fork Carson River, Town of Gardnerville-East Fork, Town of Genoa-Carson River. The signup deadline is Mar. 17 for Fiscal Year 2023.

Some project examples include grade stabilization through water drops and plantings; offsite watering; fencing along river corridors, or herbaceous weed control for noxious and invasive weeds.

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(775) 782-3661

Jessica Gwerder, District Conservationist
Carson Hicks, Soil Conservationist
David Doughty, Agricultural Engineer
Colin Wagner, Agricultural Engineer
Harry House, Farm Bill Program Assistant

8. **3:20 – 3:30pm) Other - participants can provide information on events, workshops, conferences, articles, and other relevant information.**

Goals for next meeting, to be held after Brenda gets back from trip in April, include creating actionable items keeping producers engaged, and seeking out more interested participants. Potentially next soil/regen ag workshop could be at TNC.

Brenda brought up the rafting trips that will be upcoming for this year.

9. Adjourn (3:30pm) Plan Approximate time for Next Meeting Date (final date via Doodle Poll)

Chat:

Invasive Species RFP:

<https://agri.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/agrinvgov/Content/About/2023%20BIL%20Forest%20Health-Invasive%20Species,%20Request%20for%20Proposals.pdf>

14:29:52 From Richard.Wilkinson : 10' Great Plains No-till drill scheduling contact 775-782-3661 ext. 3830

15:10:57 From Jessica Gwerder - NRCS Minden : Jessica Gwerder
775-782-3661 x 3827, Jessica.Gwerder@usda.gov

15:11:11 From Carson Hicks - NRCS Minden : Carson Hicks carson.hicks@usda.gov 775-782-3661 ext 3833