

Men seek to clean up North Fork of the South Platte River

Meeting to be held on
Oct. 7 in Bailey
to discuss plans

By Mike Potter

Staff Writer

Two men are trying to improve the water quality of the North Fork of the South Platte River and are prepared to announce their plans at an Oct. 7 meeting in Bailey.

Luke Kelly and Clint Packo, co-owners of Littleton-based Freestone Aquatics, said an

informational meeting is planned at the now-leased main Farmers Union building on County Road 68 in Bailey on Oct. 7 at 5:30 p.m.

They became involved with the plan because they manage the water at the Farmers Union property, which is now being leased on a long-term basis, and also at the North Fork Ranch near Shawnee.

Kelly said that improving the water quality in the river would increase its attractiveness to aquatic life. And more fish would mean more fish-

ermen, which would improve the economy of the area.

Right now, the biggest problem with the water is the amount of heavy metals in the stream, most significantly copper, he said

The minerals have made their way into the stream from mines at the North Fork's headwaters north of Kenosha Pass.

Water introduced into the stream from Roberts Tunnel near Grant helps dilute the

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concentration of the minerals, but more could be done to improve the water quality, he said.

Kelly said the North Fork of the South Platte River has been on the 303(d) list of the Environmental Protection Agency since the early 2000s. According to the EPA Web site, the 303(d) list is a "list of impaired waters (stream segments, lakes) that the Clean Water Act requires all states to submit for EPA approval every two years (even-numbered years). The states identify all waters where required pollution controls are not sufficient to attain or maintain applicable water quality standards and rank the waters, taking into account the uses of the water and severity of the pollution problem."

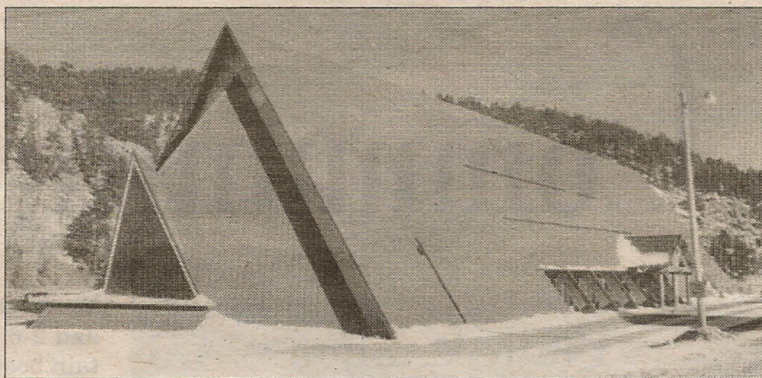
The source of the problem is a number of old mines around Kenosha Pass and along the river. There are mine tailings and collapsed mine shafts, Kelly said. Water seeps through and finds its way to the river, carrying with it copper.

One plan that Packo and Kelly are looking at is cleaning up the mine sites, but that could be an unreasonable option.

Packo said he wasn't sure how it would work to clean up the sites, or how much it would cost.

Another issue is that of permission. Some of the mines are on U.S. Forest Service land, and some are on private property, so each stakeholder would have to approve any work being done on the stakeholder's property.

But perhaps the biggest obstacle is raising money for



MEETING PLANNED

The former Farmers Union in Bailey will host a meeting on Oct. 7 as two men present their plan for cleaning up the water in the North Fork of the South Platte River. (Photo by Mike Potter/The Flume)

the project, if it comes to that.

"There are all sorts of variables, some of which, if we can raise the money, we'll ask their permission," Packo said.

He said the mine tailings could be moved as an easy way to help reduce the amount of copper in the water.

"Nobody has signed a dotted line. Nobody has given us a check."

**— Luke Kelly
Co-owner of
Littleton-based
Freestone Aquatics**

Not all of the contaminants of the river are from former mining activity, though.

Kelly said that some of the rocks near the headwaters produce naturally acidic drainage.

Park County Tourism and Community Development Director Gary Nichols said that acid drainage can originate from a point source, such as a mine, and non-point sources, which are naturally occurring sources.

The river has been a big interest to Packo and Kelly. Both have put in a combined total of 340 hours of work into the project so far, and are now looking to set up a nonprofit to help organize their work.

Kelly said the nonprofit would provide a focal point for the input of the community and the stakeholders.

"We're not looking to be compensated," he said. "But we need the locals to have the same interest."

The U.S. Forest Service, along with Denver Water, the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the South Platte Enhancement Board agreed that something should be done, but nobody has committed anything to the project yet, Kelly said.

"Nobody has signed a dotted line," Kelly said. "Nobody has given us a check."

Kelly said that the number of property owners with land adjacent to the North Fork of the South Platte River is huge, and many of the ones they've contacted are on board with the plan.

"If we can improve the water quality a little bit... it could produce some great results for some visiting fishermen," Kelly said.