



History of Idarado Mining Company Tailings Piles

Mining for gold, silver and other metals began in the Telluride area in 1875 and continued through 1978. Hundreds of mines and hundreds of miles of tunnels were constructed below ground and dozens of ore mills were built, many of which are now considered historic treasures and ties to the areas rich origin.

The mills operated to process ore from those miles of tunnels. The mills had fascinating histories and wonderful names, including local ones like the Liberty Bell and the Pandora, from which Idarado Legacy neighborhoods take their names. The Telluride mines and mill shut down in 1978, after having evolved from gold and silver mines to one of the most important strategic producers of lead for the WWII war effort.

With the suspension of mining and milling operations in the late 1970's, the need to refine management and reclamation of the tailing piles in the east end of the valley became evident. The hundred years of mining and milling operations, left large tailing piles dominating the eastern end of the valley between Bridal Veil Falls and the Town of Telluride. These materials being the remnant portion of the ore extracted from the mines and processed through the mills were primarily placed in two pile locations.

Activities shifted from the day to day management of the mining and milling operations to the initiation of a reclamation and closure program designed to control impacts from previous mining and milling operations in the area and provide the foundation for future use of these areas. In 1985 an extensive environmental study was initiated by the State of Colorado (State) and Idarado Mining Company (IMC) to evaluate past mining and milling impacts within the Telluride Valley and surrounding high country. In 1992, the State and IMC reached agreement on an appropriate plan. This plan included reclamation and remediation of historic mining and milling operations within the Telluride Valley and high country. The selected plan was not only protective of human health and the environment, but also was designed to cause minimal disturbance to the historic landscape and impacts on the Town of Telluride. Along the Valley Floor, the State and IMC agreed the best reclamation option was in-situ revegetation of the tailing piles. Although, the environmental study evaluated the area now being developed for homesites, it was determined that no necessary activities were required in these areas.

For 2 years, IMC implemented in-situ reclamation of the tailing piles by improving the tailings material through the addition of nutrients enriching the tailing material, seeding and watering the tailing piles to encourage plant growth. The following 3 years, IMC watered the plants to enhance the development of the plant communities. These management actions were

completed in 1999 with the tailing piles having been transformed from bare rock piles to the natural meadow appearance of today – the foundation of a success story in the final chapter of the historic mining sites, and an important chapter in the Idaho Legacy story.

Since this time, IMC has monitored the tailing piles and, under the current agreement with the State, will continue monitoring for another 6 years without watering or otherwise actively managing the reclaimed tailing piles. While the tailing piles have progressed well during the first 5 or 6 years of the monitoring period, the State maintains the ability to implement a contingency remedy requiring the piles be covered with new materials and reseeded if the vegetative stands do not meet the State's success standards at the end of the monitoring period in 2012. Recently discussions initiated by the State with IMC have fostered a mutual interest in the future long term aesthetic appeal of the tailing piles which can be further enhanced by efforts concentrating on the improvement of tailing soil by adding fertilizer, reseeded, mowing and watering. The State and IMC are in the process of revising their agreement to remove the contingency remedy and allow for long-term management steps for IMC to permanently maintain the tailings. In this way, the aesthetic appeal will continue to be maintained for all to enjoy.