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Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor

February 15, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing today to alert you to a developing situation in Lake County, Colorado, that threatens human life and the environmental quality on one of the West's great rivers. Your immediate action is needed to assure that we have done all we can to avert a catastrophic event.

The Leadville Mine Drainage Tunnel near Leadville, Colorado, collects and drains water contaminated with a number of heavy metals from a number of parts of the California Gulch Superfund Site. While the tunnel discharged directly to the Arkansas River for decades, since 1992 much of the tunnel's discharge has been treated at a wastewater treatment plant operated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

More recently, however, experts tell us that one or more collapses within the tunnel have caused a blockage that is, in turn, creating a large underground lake of contaminated water. Experts now estimate that the underground lake holds as much as one billion gallons of contaminated water.

For some years, the State of Colorado, joined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has expressed to the Bureau of Reclamation our increasing fears of a potentially catastrophic release of water to the Arkansas River that could, depending on where it occurred, threaten human life in and around the town of Leadville and contaminate the river all the way to the Pueblo reservoir. Conceivably, such a release could result in the loss of life, cause untold human misery, threaten the drinking water supplies for a half million people, impact farmers and ranchers, and leave the river, and the recreation economy it also supports, degraded for decades.

This situation is now being exacerbated by the above normal snowpack that is accumulating in Colorado's high country. When spring arrives, large quantities of additional water will infiltrate into the mine, increasing the underground lake's elevation and head and raising the risk of a catastrophic event.

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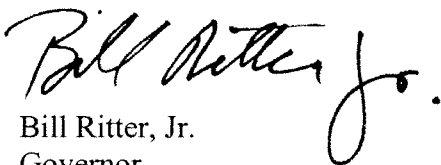
The State of Colorado believes the Bureau of Reclamation has the authority and responsibility to assist in reducing the amount of water accumulating within the tunnel, and treating the water before it is discharged to the river. The State of Colorado and EPA have been trying since 2001 to find mutually agreeable solutions to managing both surface and ground water in this area. Working together, the state and EPA have developed comprehensive plans for water management, but those plans depend, among other things, on the ability to pump water from the mine to the Bureau's existing wastewater treatment plant. The Bureau's cost exposure is modest but their role is critically important. Nonetheless, the Bureau has steadfastly resisted all efforts to engage it in meaningful discussions on how best to address this issue.

The issue is now approaching a crisis stage. Therefore, I am requesting that you immediately request the Secretary of the Interior to direct the Bureau of Reclamation to fully and responsibly engage with state and local efforts to alleviate this potential crisis and take the following steps with the greatest possible urgency:

- Expedite the drilling of extraction wells into the Leadville Mine Drainage Tunnel to draw down the mine water pool behind the collapse;
- Treat the water pumped by these wells at the Bureau's water treatment plant prior to discharge into the Arkansas River;
- Construct a bulkhead within the tunnel and backfill the mouth of the tunnel to prevent future blowout events;
- Reduce the water level within the mine workings until surface seeps that have developed in recent months disappear, and maintain mine water levels to minimize the risk of a future catastrophic blowout; and
- Review and test all Bureau of Reclamation emergency procedures necessary to protect the health and safety of Lake County residents living in proximity to the tunnel in the event of a blowout.

I am confident that Colorado's Congressional delegation would be fully supportive of any and all efforts needed to mobilize the Bureau's response to this situation. The people of Colorado, and especially the people of Lake County, would be immensely grateful for your immediate intervention. And I stand ready to assist in any way.

Sincerely,



Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor