

BOSTON HILL PROJECT PROGRESSING

by Andrew Lindlof, AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA Staffer

The Town of Silver City's Boston Hill Open Space is familiar as a place for hiking, biking, observing nature, dog-walking, and jogging. Much of Boston Hill was purchased by the Town in 1999 through the generous bequest of Linnie Merle Forward. The current 10-mile trail network was developed in 2001.

Prior to becoming a public resource, Boston Hill mining began with the extraction of silver in the 1870s and continued with removal of iron and manganese ore from the 1890s to the 1970s. Visitors still see evidence of great feats of engineering.

The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land (NMAML) Program also has a long history on the hill. A unit of the state's Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, the program was charged during the mid-1980s with the task of making historic mining features safe and/or functional for recreational use. By 1989 it had safeguarded 37 openings and identified over 300 other mine-related features on Boston Hill. Further remediation yielded construction of chain-link fences and mesh netting. Examples are found near the Spring Street trailhead and High Desert Humane Society building. Later, researchers from Western New Mexico University found evidence that some old mines provided important habitat for wildlife, including bats.

NMAML is involved in a new effort to promote a safe and enjoyable environment on the hill while protecting historic mining features and wildlife habitat. Contractors Kleinfelder Inc., Golder Associates, and Dekker/Perich/Sabatini, are working with NMAML and community members to plan, design, and implement safeguarding strategies. The project has four phases: Assessment, Planning, Design, and Construction.

Community engagement meetings were held in Silver City on March 21-23, August 8-10, and October 5-8 in order to address the Assessment, Planning, and Design Phases. These meetings incorporated site visits, review/recap sessions, and lectures from an expert on bat habitats that incorporate abandoned mines.

During site planning and design visits to Boston Hill, the AML team and community members examined such hazards as open stopes, shafts, tunnels, pits, and collapse-prone ground. Each was addressed through optimal safeguarding measures for both humans and wildlife. Key areas of focus were the northern sections of Boston Hill near the Spring Street trailhead and those within previously fenced off-areas. Other hazards addressed were predominantly open stopes and shafts with potentially deadly fall hazards near east and southeast borders of the open space.

The Boston Hill project team is currently working on finishing its Phase I and II assessment reports. Phase III work is expected to begin in late January. For more information, please contact either NMAML Program Manager John Kretzmann at 505.476.3423 or John.Kretzmann@state.nm.us; or Dekker/Perich/Sabatini ASLA Associate Ken Romig at 505.761.9700 or kenr@dpsdesign.org.

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Silver City Watershed Keepers celebrates success, enters new phase

by Andrew Lindlof, AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA Staffer

The volunteer environmental quality monitoring group, Silver City Watershed Keepers (SCWK), has provided valuable information and science education to our community since its establishment by GRIP's OSM/VISTA Program in 2011. The group is comprised of community volunteers of all ages and experience levels who work to protect the San Vicente Creek watershed through monitoring, education, and outreach. As GRIP's OSM/VISTA program comes to a close, after four years of successful capacity building in our community, the SCWK has been engaged in a planning process to ensure continuation of the program.

Currently, the SCWK collects water quality data at four sites along the San Vicente's perennial (year-round flow) channel. Members and volunteers actively monitor and record critical water quality parameters. These include temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, conductivity, salinity, total dissolved solids, transparency, turbidity, nitrates, and total phosphates. By observing the quality of water, the SCWK can interpret the health of the creek, which may be impacted by legacy mines or mill sites as well as non-point source pollution. The SCWK meets and observes at least every quarter to collect water quality data and observe the condition of the channel and flood plain. Recently, the SCWK made great strides in education, outreach, and expanding the scope of the program as a whole. With much dedication and enthusiasm from Aldo Leopold Charter School (ALCS)—through its science curriculum and Youth Conservation Corps grants—monitoring along the creek will occur at least once every month during the school year.

Promoting scientific literacy and an understanding of the watershed is a major goal. This year SCWK partnered with the New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau (NMED-SWQB), Gila Conservation Education Center (GCEC), Aldo Leopold Charter School, The Wellness Coalition (TWC), Silver Consolidated Schools, and Silver City MainStreet Project to promote water education in the community. With the help of GCEC and MainStreet, on July 20 we hosted the Third Annual Big Ditch Day, a celebration of community, education, and San Vicente Creek.

GCEC, ALCS, Silver Schools, and TWC, have held many water-based learning sessions in the field. With such experiential events, we were able to reach out directly to schools and after-school programs and convey the importance of water quality, monitoring techniques/theory, and even a bit of fluvial geomorphology (how rivers affect landforms). As the responsible regulatory agency, the NMED-SWQB has been a major partner since the creation of the SCWK program, providing insight, advice, training, equipment, and experience to volunteers and staff alike. As the agency of authority, the NMED-SWQB serves a critical role in the program. When the SCWK identifies possible sources of concern about the health of the Silver City Watershed, the NMED-SWQB is there to investigate and remediate as needed.

Although GRIP's VISTA program comes to a close in early 2014, the program will continue its successful efforts under the guidance of a Technical Advisory Committee that includes GRIP and the state Environment Department as core members of the committee. Aldo Leopold Charter School students through science classes and the Youth Conservation Corps program will conduct regular monitoring and participate in other SCWK projects. If you wish to become involved or would like more information, please contact me at andrew@gilaresources.info or 575.538-8078.