

## Crow Creek Water cleanup efforts continue

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CHEYENNE -- Local rancher Claudia Lummis said Crow Creek's water quality has improved quite a bit, but it still has a long way to go.

"I've lived here for 56 years, and it's always been polluted," she said.

A railroad company often dumped its waste in the creek when she was a child. Three or four decades ago, a gasoline tanker ruptured near the waterway. And early on, she was warned never to drink from the creek.

Last year oil-tinged water and various chemical compounds drifted from Frontier Refining to its neighbors at the Lummis Ranch, which hosts a portion of Crow Creek. Lummis said the company bought the contaminated property last October, and she doesn't know whether the spills have continued since then.

Monitoring and cleanup efforts must be tailored to the specific contaminant, said Eric Hargett from the Water Quality Division of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

And the process is ongoing.

The department is in the initial phase of addressing Crow Creek's sediment and selenium issues. In the coming months, DEQ officials will work alongside the city of Cheyenne to pinpoint how the sediment is reaching the waterway.

DEQ also will collaborate with officials from Frontier Refining to correct the release of selenium that exceeds the refinery's effluent discharge permit. The company was fined \$850,000 earlier this year for 2008 pollution violations along the stream, including the spills onto the Lummis property.

But Crow Creek has been the focus of efforts to improve its water quality for more than a decade. The stream was labeled as impaired after officials identified ammonia and fecal coliform in 1996.

Hargett said the ammonia discharges were eliminated after upgrades to the city's two wastewater treatment facilities in 2007.

But not every problem is easy to pinpoint, he added.

For example, it's difficult to identify the origin of E. coli in an urban stream, because the bacteria could have entered the waterway from multiple sources at different times of the year.

Crow Creek's status as an urban stream also influences the cleanup process. The addition of artificial wetlands is one way to clear contamination naturally, said Jim Cochran, district manager with the Laramie County Conservation District.

But this solution poses a threat to neighboring residents, since it increases mosquito breeding grounds and raises the risk for diseases like West Nile virus.

Nearby homes, roadways and construction sites also increase the threat of contamination as storm water runoff carries dirt, oil and grease into the creek. He added that the conservation district has worked in conjunction with Wyoming DEQ and the city to teach surrounding property owners about ways to limit unintentional pollution, such as using the correct amount of water and fertilizer on lawns, as well as edging lawns with rock gardens to catch and filter sediment. Contractors are educated about the correct way to install silt fences that will keep dirt from washing away.

These agencies also continue to monitor the creek for improvements and potential hazards. Meanwhile, volunteer groups have organized creek cleanups to aid the effort. Cochran said cleanup is a lengthy process, and the conservation district was given a 13-year time line after Crow Creek was first listed as impaired.

Lummis remains skeptical.

"(Officials would) test it and test it and test it, and then nothing would happen," she said. "I'm sure the refinery got fined, but that didn't help the people downstream. I worry about our cattle. I worry about the deer hunters. Does it contaminate the meat? I don't know. Does it contaminate the wildlife? I don't know. But they're drinking it and walking in it."