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From: EPA Press Office
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Subject: DENVER POST: EPA chief Scott Pruitt right to pursue funds for Gold King Mine victims

THE DENVER POST

EPA Chief Scott Pruitt Right to Pursue Funds for Gold King Mine Victims

Editorial

August 19, 2017

<http://www.denverpost.com/2017/08/18/epa-chief-scott-pruitt-right-to-pursue-funds-for-gold-king-mine-victims/>

Scott Pruitt, head of the Environmental Protection Agency, is doing the right thing in his efforts to make whole the victims of the Gold King Mine spill that spewed 3 million of gallons of toxic water into the Animas River and downstream to New Mexico.

The EPA notoriously denied around 70 claims that were filed in the aftermath of the spill, amounting to \$1.2 billion in damages for things like harm to the tourism industry that relies on the river, farmers who were unable to water their crops, ranchers who had to treat water before giving it to cattle, and countless other impacts.

The government claimed sovereign immunity — the long-held principal that the federal government cannot be sued. It's an infuriating rule, but one that exists for good reason.

The EPA employees who triggered the Gold King deluge were trying to help. They were working on privately owned property to help clean up historic contamination from decades of mining operations. Opening up the EPA for lawsuits in such situations sets a dangerous precedent.

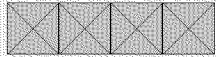
But sometimes the government's negligence is so egregious that hiding behind sovereign immunity — as the EPA did under President Barack Obama — becomes shameful.

Lawmakers in Colorado did the right thing by approving \$4.3 million in settlement payments with families who lost loved ones and homes in the Lower North Fork Fire. That fire was started by a government agency controlled burn. There are times when sovereign immunity, or limits on government liability, are unjust and lawmakers are wise to realize that and compensate victims for their losses.

We are glad Pruitt has committed to re-reviewing the claims that were denied under Obama.

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