Wet winter creates issues at toxic mine site

By Kathryn Reed

Crews are diligently working at the Leviathan Mine superfund site in Alpine County to ensure contaminants don't reach nearby waterways.

"We are doing our best to prevent a discharge, but it is touch and go," said Scott Ferguson who is in charge of overseeing the regulatory and compliance aspects of the site. Last week he gave an update to the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board directors about what is going on with this project.

The ice and slush on the ponds make work difficult. Several feet of snow still remain. Just accessing the area is problematic, let alone working in those conditions to treat the acid mine drainage. The work is labor intensive.

This is only the fourth year for spring treatment operations at the mine site. The other years were in 2005, 2006 and 2011. And this year was unique in that the work started a month sooner than those three years because the abundance of rain and snow this winter.

The threat is that all of the moisture and the spring runoff could lead to toxins leaving the immediate area and polluting waterways downstream. Leviathan Creek, Bryant Creek and the East Fork Carson River are all nearby. The mine is five miles east of Markleeville and six miles west of Topaz Lake.

The last time there was a discharge was in 2006.

Leviathan has not been an operating mine since the 1960s. The previous 100 years it was a sulfur mine. In 2000 it was deemed a superfund site. Various lawsuits, with the last **settlement**

agreement coming in 2015, has Lahontan and ARCO working together to find a final resolution for cleaning up the site. This whole process, though, will take decades and may never be completely resolved.

Nonetheless, the goal for now is to treat as much of the discharge as possible.

Removed from the site since 1999 have been:

- 405,000 pounds of aluminum
- 5,500 pounds arsenic
- 590,000 pounds iron
- 6,400 pounds nickel.

In 2016, 163 tons of sludge were trucked to Beatty, Nev., and 5.7 million gallons of acid mine discharge were treated.