

On an October afternoon several members of the CVEPA board traveled up Yule Creek, above Marble, to the end of the road. The viewpoint above Windy Point affords the only practical viewpoint of the Pride of America (recently re-named) Marble Quarry operation.

The brilliant gold aspens framed a very different view of the quarry. The small mountain on which the McIntire cabin set is being removed. The cabin is gone and the stone hill is being quarried out. Yule Creek east of the knoll was dry and was littered with many marble blocks, approximately 4' x 8' in size. There did not appear to be a method to the placement of the blocks. A new access road crossing the creek to the opposite Treasure Mountain side of the valley is under construction and digging into that hillside has begun.

Having concerns about the alterations to Yule Creek, CVEPA reported these observations to the Colorado Department of Reclamation, Mining and Safety. The DRMS officer was very helpful. He said that his office had already been contacted about "the spill". CVEPA had no knowledge of a spill. The quarry operation reported the accidental release of 5,500 gallons of diesel oil onto the ground outside of the quarry. Luckily, the oil spill occurred on the west side of the McIntire Knoll and no oil is thought to have gotten into the creek. Per regulations, all work at the quarry is suspended until the cleanup is completed. Clean Harbor Environmental Services is effecting the clean-up which may cost well into the 7 figures.

One of the effects of the shut down is that the work of "armoring" Yule Creek is also halted. Armoring is the use of stone to protect the creek from scouring and erosion, hence the proliferation of marble blocks in the stream. Due to the onset of winter and the shutdown, the armoring may not be completed before spring runoff.

The armoring is part of an Army Corps of Engineers sanctioned temporary relocation of the quarry access road permitted in September 2018.

The latest permitting for the Pride of America Quarry extends decades into the future and is an industrial scale not seen in the Crystal Valley since the hayday of the Mid-Continent Coal Mine. The Quarry itself may be employing upward of 50 men. The Quarry trucks the marble to Delta, CO where their storage facility is expanding into a full cutting and finishing operation.

Yule marble may be the largest white marble quarry in the world and is of the finest quality. The Quarry has worked with back country enthusiasts in providing year round high country access along Yule Creek. In an agreement brokered by the Gunnison County Commissioners, the quarry will construct a viewing area at the end of the road for observers which should be operational in 2020. The "pristine" Yule Creek Valley was the site of much marble extraction and railroad construction at the beginning of the last century. Quality of the resource and market demand are coupled with relative good access and high tech extraction methods. The expansion of the Yule marble quarry promises to be of a magnitude never seen in the upper valley.

Clearly, this is a call to all of us that yet another challenge in environmental protection and co-operation demands our vigilant attention.

A copy of the new permit and a good history of the operation is available on the DRMS site by searching the permit # M1999058 and regarding the entry of 1/22/2016 on page 8.