

COMMUNITY

Case study

CC&V upgrades water system and settles dispute

In the western United States it is often said that water is as valuable as gold. In the Cripple Creek Mining District, a reliable water supply is vital for Cripple Creek & Victor Gold Mining Company's (CC&V) Cresson Mine.

The right to use the precious resource in Colorado is established by the doctrine of "first in time, first in use." Those who have been continuously using the water the longest, have the right to continue using it. The City of Victor gained water rights from the slopes of Pikes Peak in the late 1890s, during the heyday of mining in the Cripple Creek District. CC&V has purchased this water from Victor since the inception of modern mining in the 1970s.

Until 2005, Victor was able to supply enough water to CC&V, even after the development of the large scale Cresson Mine in 1995. Problems with Victor's water supply were apparent in 2005 following several years of severe drought in the region. Both Victor and the nearby City of Cripple Creek thought they might be able to supply some additional water, but a decades old lawsuit over the rights to the water posed a problem.

Victor acquired water rights from the 1890 town of Altman in the 1970s. The town's water rights had been transferred to the Southern Colorado Power Company in a foreclosure of United Gold Mines, which was a group of mines who had combined to try to keep the mines open in the district. When they failed, the large debt to the power company was paid with water rights. Victor purchased the water rights and then filed a claim for the rights, along with a request to change the point of diversion. Cripple Creek objected to the change, and Victor ultimately objected to some of Cripple Creek's water projects as well.

But CC&V needed more water so CC&V General Manager, Ron Largent, initiated negotiations to settle the water disputes between the Cities of Victor and Cripple Creek. Ultimately both cities dropped their objections to the other's water cases, and agreed to cooperate on upgrades to each city's water supply system, including for the first time in memory linking Victor and Cripple Creek together.

The agreement allowed Cripple Creek to drill two additional wells. CC&V installed a pipeline from the wells to Victor's water supply system; Cripple Creek installed a pipeline to tie the wells to its water supply system. The Cripple Creek water is sold to Victor, which in turn sells water to CC&V. In addition, should Cripple Creek have issues with its water supply, Victor can supply water through the now connected water supply systems.

The improved water supply system supports the CC&V operation now, but will also be an asset for the Cities of Victor and Cripple Creek in the future, long after mining is complete.

