

# Crews burying mine's toxic past

**Dana Nichols, Stockton Record, 9-6-11**

KENNEDY MEADOW - Work has begun to rebury radioactive waste at a former uranium mine where campers once vacationed in a remote corner of the Stanislaus National Forest.

Forest officials announced that a crew from Engineering/Remediation Resources Group of Martinez began work Aug. 25 at the Juniper Uranium Mine. The remediation is being paid for with \$1.5 million from the federal government's Superfund for handling toxic waste.

The Juniper Uranium Mine is not far off Eagle Meadow Road, about 40 miles east of Sonora and just two miles west of Kennedy Meadow.

Until eight years ago, the former mine site was used occasionally by RV campers and hunters because it provided a rare level spot to park in a remote section of the forest, said John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.

"I know the site intimately," Buckley said.

For decades, regular tests of the site found radiation levels so low that they were not deemed a problem. But in 2003, perhaps because surface materials had been washed away, authorities detected radiation at levels that exceeded federal guidelines, Buckley said.

That was when forest officials closed the road to the mine and erected signs to warn hikers and hunters.

"In one hour of standing, hiking, mountain biking, target shooting or etc., they would be exposed in many places to the maximum radiation the EPA recommends for an entire year," Buckley said.

Buckley said that on a number of occasions over the years, he had gone to the Juniper mine site to meet with forest staff.

"So I got my dose for a year," he said.

According to federal records, the open-pit Juniper Uranium Mine operated from 1956 to 1966. During that time, mine crews removed about 500 tons of ore.

Now, the 34-acre mine site has about 50,000 cubic yards of tailings in various piles, some of which are radioactive. The remediation plan calls for that material to be returned to the mine pit and covered with a layer of nonradioactive material.

The plan also calls for steps to limit water flow through the tailings and a drain system to reduce the amount of radioactivity that reaches creeks and popular locations such as nearby Sardine Meadow.

The mine is at 8,500 feet elevation, which means work will pause once winter snows close the area. The plan is for the work to be done in the fall of 2012.