

**ANCIENT WATER**

# Coal Miners Strike It Wet In Scofield

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SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

SCOFIELD — Coal miners have been working seven days a week and their bosses have been scouring the West for more pumps and plastic pipe to siphon off a flood of prehistoric water from central Utah's Skyline Mine.

The subterranean deluge began Aug. 16 when miners burrowing 3 miles deep into the Wasatch Plateau inadvertently tapped into a sandstone formation, saturated like a "rock sponge," that is pouring 4,700 gallons a minute into the mine.

All mining operations have been suspended while 234 miners and other workers move equipment higher and set up electric pumps and a network of pipes.

"It seems there's a drought everywhere but the Skyline Mine," said Doug Johnson, manager of technical support for the huge mine that is bored straight into a mountain south of Scofield in Carbon County.

He said miners were cutting tunnels into a coal seam in preparation for installation of a larger piece of mining equipment when they exposed fractures that sent the torrent into the mine. Since then, the company has purchased about 53,000 feet of 12-inch plastic pipe at \$13 a foot and several dozen pumps at an estimated cost of \$6 million.

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So far, some of the water has been diverted into abandoned sections of the mine and some is being pumped into Eccle's Creek, which drains into Scofield Reservoir in Carbon County. Because the mine's portal is in Carbon County and its coal beds are mostly in Emery County, the company plans to drill into the formation from above and pump water 3,500 feet into Electric Lake in Emery County.

That is good news to Gene Johansen, chairman of the Emery Water Conservancy District, who said it has long irked Emery water users that the mine pumped its normal seepage into Scofield Reservoir in Carbon County.

"There are 135 square miles of coal leases under our watershed," Johansen said Thursday. Until now, he said, mine operators assumed water in the mine was under Carbon County.

The new font appears to be a saturated sandstone stratum called the Starpoint Formation.

Tests of samples of the water — which Johnson described as "old and cold" — indicate it was trapped in the stone at least 10,000 years ago when mammoths and other ice-age animals roamed the area.

Kevin Christopherson, southeastern region supervisor for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, has been monitoring the outflow into the Scofield Reservoir to determine what impact it might have on the fishery. At present, he said, there are live bugs on the water and no dead fish.

"The verdict is still out," Christopherson said. "We'll have to come back later and assess the situation."

While it appears that the pumps and pipes will solve the draining problem by next week, Johnson said the emergency response has been hard on miners who are used to extracting coal — not water — from the earth.

"Crews are getting tired because they've been working seven days a week, and it looks like they're going to have to work through the Labor Day weekend," he said. "It has been a pain in the butt."

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