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BUSINESS

METHANE-CAPTURE PROJECT CONTINUES

By Jason Blevins
The Denver Post

Aspen Skiing's one-of-a-kind methane-harvesting project — which converts waste methane at the Elk Creek Mine in Somerset into electricity — is still operating despite news that Oxbow Mining will idle what was once the country's most productive underground coal mine.

"The project was designed to run after the mine closes, so not a problem," said Auden Schendler, Aspen Skiing's environmental guru who hatched the plan to harvest methane from the mine and convert it into 24 million kilowatt-hours of power a year, enough to power all of the company's four ski areas, 13 restaurants and three hotels.

The project — developed by Denver-based Vessels Coal Gas — launched a year ago and united the unlikely partners of Oxbow, one of the world's largest coal miners, and Aspen Skiing, an international leader in environmentally focused operations.

Oxbow announced Monday it was idling the Elk Creek Mine, which has struggled since a fire that started a year ago pinched production. The company said it was laying off 115 workers.