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CDOT completes Glenwood Canyon rockfall project

Last fence installed Sept. 1, crews last day was earlier this week

EAGLE and GARFIELD COUNTIES/GLENWOOD CANYON -The last rockfall protective fence in Glenwood Canyon was installed Thursday, marking the completion of the 4-month emergency rockfall mitigation project, the Colorado Department of Transportation announced. The I-70 Glenwood Canyon emergency rockfall mitigation project wrapped up Tuesday, Sept. 6, as crews spent the day cleaning up the site along the westbound Interstate 70 corridor just west of the Hanging Lake Tunnel.

Though the numbers are still being totaled, project manager Jim Stepisnik of Yenter Companies said the team completed the project under the \$2-million budget and two weeks before their Sept. 15 contractual deadline. "Completion of the project to me is bittersweet," Stepisnik said. "On projects like these, teams are built from several different entities. You become somewhat of a family."

Subcontracting companies, Yenter Companies, which specializes in drilling, blasting, and soil and rock stabilization, and SGM, a Glenwood Springs engineering and surveying firm worked alongside CDOT Engineers on this job after a rockslide in February completely shut down I-70 through Glenwood Canyon for nearly a week.

Stepisnik and his crew worked to install four fences, which created barriers along the canyon wall two miles west of Hanging Lake Tunnel. These barriers drastically improve safety in this area, he said. Three of the four (fences) are the largest fences in the U.S. with a 5,000 kilojoule rating.

The project was anything but easy. Crews worked in extreme conditions on steep mountainous terrain against heavy traffic on the interstate. Additionally, the project called for a two-day canyon shutdown for helicopter operations. However, due to challenging conditions in the canyon, the team had to cancel the first operation, obtain a larger helicopter, and completed helicopter operations in one day.

Crews were required to hike up the canyon walls several times per day to prepare and install the fencing, as there was no machinery on the canyon slope, Stepisnik said. The boulder field was unpredictable leaving crew members unsure of the stability of the slope. Rock removal was done by hand to dig for the concrete foundation. And, some boulders were so big they had to be drilled first then split with a hydraulic rock splitter so they could be removed, he said.

Despite these challenges and a 4-week delivery delay of fence materials, crews completed the project two weeks before the deadline, Stepisnik said. “We went into this venture with the best subcontractors and CDOT team available,” he said. “If we were to start this job tomorrow knowing what we know now this team would be the one we want.”

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