

HARDROCK MINING IN COLORADO

In 2007, Congress will be considering changes to the antiquated Mining Law of 1872 that governs how gold, silver and other 'hardrock' minerals are developed on our National Forests and national resource lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Here are some nuggets on mining in Colorado.

Mining Activities

As of 2006 mining interests have staked more than 5,000 active mining claims in Colorado, covering an estimated 123,457 acres.

The six Colorado counties with the most acres claimed on the public lands are:

Gunnison County 22,524 acres	Park County 9,406 acres
Ouray County 8,512 acres	Montrose County 6,757 acres
San Miguel County 6,533 acres	Moffat County 6,533 acres

In 2006, there were 9 active or intermittent hardrock mining operations in Colorado, employing 942 people on site, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, representing 0.04 percent of the total employment in the state of Colorado.

Operator	Mine	Commodity	Employment
AngloGold Ashanti	Cresson/Cripple Creek	Gold	325
Climax	Climax	Molybdenum	17
Climax	Henderson	Molybdenum	565
Dennison Mines	St. Jude	Uranium	0
Dennison Mines	Sunday Mine	Uranium	11
Mt. Royale Ventures	Cash Mine	Gold	13
Farleys Machine Shop	Alma Placer	Gold	6
Rhino Mining	Little Hope	Gold	5
Mt. Elbert Mining	Willow Creek Mine	Gold	0

Current mining operations have disturbed nearly 11,000 acres of land in Colorado.



The Summitville Project (above) lies abandoned near the San Luis Valley.

Area of Specific Concern – Mt. Emmons

In April of 2004, the BLM gave 155 acres of federal land worth millions of dollars on top of Red Lady Mountain to Phelps Dodge, a giant US mining company, for the sum of \$790. The 1872 Mining Law allows someone to 'patent' (convert public land to private ownership) a mining claim for either \$2.50 or \$5.00 per acre. While the patenting provision of the law has been under moratorium for the past ten years, this patent was grandfathered into the moratorium.

The patent was granted to Phelps Dodge with no warning to area citizens and the BLM has denied all protests over the transfer. Local citizens, the Town of Crested Butte, and Gunnison County sued in federal court to overturn the sale. The Interior Department/BLM and Phelps Dodge successfully argued in court that citizens and local governments have no rights to challenge such mining patents. The land is now private and the owner of the claims, now US Energy Corp., has announced their intention to submit a proposal to construct and operate a large-scale molybdenum mine on Mt. Emmons.

Abandoned Mines and the Most Polluted Mine Sites

The Colorado Department of Natural Resources estimates that there are more than 23,000 abandoned mines (including coal mines) in Colorado. The counties with the most abandoned mines or the largest population centers near them are: Boulder, Clear Creek, Montrose, and San Juan Counties.

The estimated cost of repairing safety hazards alone is nearly \$50 million, according to the State. The state does not know how many abandoned mines are causing water pollution or other environmental problems. State funding coupled with funding from the federal the Surface Mining Reclamation Control Act generates about \$1.0 million annually for cleanup projects.

Of the 79 mines sites identified by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted sites in the country or "Superfund Sites," eight are located in Colorado.

1. California Gulch, Leadville
2. Central City/Clear Creek, Idaho Springs
3. Denver Radium, Denver
4. Eagle Mine, Minturn/Redcliff
5. Lincoln Park, Canon City
6. Summitville Mine, Rio Grande County
7. Uravan Uranium Project, Uravan
8. Captain Jack, Boulder

Community Health and Environmental Impacts

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, metal or hardrock mining in Colorado released over 8 million pounds of toxins in 2005, the most recent year for which information is available. The mines that reported the most pollutants released into the environment are the Climax Molybdenum- Henderson mine and mill and the Cripple Creek and Victor mine. Colorado ranks 10th among the 17 states that reported chemical releases from metal mines in 2005.

Loss of Colorado's Public Lands to Mining Interests

As of 2004 an estimated 800,000 acres of public land in Colorado, an area three times the size of Rocky Mountain National Park, have already been sold to private interests for either \$2.50 or \$5.00 per acre. This subsidized sale of public lands is allowed under the federal 1872 Mining Law.

Colorado in 1872

In 1872 when the Mining Law was passed, Colorado was still a territory and wouldn't join the Union until 1876. Edward Moody McCook was the territorial governor. According to the 1870 census, Colorado only had a population of 39,864 and Denver's population was under 5,000.

Times have changed. It is time to change the Mining Law.