

ABANDONED MINES

October 2016

THE SITUATION



There are **approximately 500,000 abandoned hardrock mines in the United States**, with an estimated cleanup cost as high as \$54 billion. Hardrock mining companies, however, are not required to pay anything to address this legacy of their industry.

HOW'D WE GET TO THIS POINT?

Meaningful environmental and financial assurance requirements for hardrock mines were not established until 1980, meaning **over two hundred years of hardrock mining operations were conducted with no requirements for miners to clean up when they left**.

WHY SHOULD AMERICANS CARE?

Taxpayers are currently on the hook to clean up these legacy abandoned mines. Available funding is so low that abandoned mines become ticking time bombs, eventually creating serious problems like the blowout at the Gold King Mine in Colorado last year.

WHAT'S THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT?

Rivers throughout the country, and particularly the West, are constantly **inundated with millions of gallons of toxic acid mine drainage every year**, making the water unusable and unsuitable for wildlife.

IS OUR WATER AFFECTED?

Yes. Leaking abandoned mines cause streams and rivers devoid of life, **toxic metals in drinking water supplies**, and **ruined landscapes**.

THE FACTS

~\$2.6 billion

in taxpayer money was spent **cleaning up abandoned hardrock mines** between 1998 and 2007 (GAO)

95% of people in Montana **support requiring the mining industry to pay to clean up abandoned mines**, according to Earthworks

~\$300 billion

worth of minerals have been **removed from public lands without a single cent in royalties being paid to the American people**, according to Earthworks

WHAT'S CONGRESS DOING?

Not much, other than using taxpayer money to fund clean-up activities at inadequate levels.



In keeping with the principle of making polluters pay, **Democrats believe that the mining industry should be required to contribute to a fund that would be used to clean up abandoned hardrock mines**.



Instead of supporting tougher standards or establishing a mandatory cleanup fund, Republicans are asking for volunteers. This Congress they promoted bills that weaken environmental reviews for mining projects, even for common minerals like sand and gravel.

HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

Congress should pass legislation to **significantly update the Mining Law of 1872 and require the hardrock mining industry to pay to clean up hardrock mines**.