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Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

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March 24, 2016

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Committee
on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doug Lamborn
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy
and Mineral Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Chairman Lamborn:

As you are well aware, the uncontrolled release of metal-laden water from the Gold King Mine in Colorado highlighted very clearly the problem of abandoned hardrock mines throughout the West. As unfortunate as the Gold King incident was, it pales in comparison to the chronic harm that people and communities throughout the country face from the safety and environmental hazards posed by abandoned mines. An estimated 500,000 of these sites exist, some of which are leaching millions of gallons of acid mine waste into rivers and streams each year with no end in sight. The cost to address all these sites was estimated by the Bush Administration to be between \$20 billion and \$54 billion dollars.¹

Defusing these ticking time bombs and fully reclaiming abandoned hardrock mines will require a comprehensive solution. While voluntary and philanthropic efforts may provide relief in certain instances, they cannot come close to truly addressing the vast scale of the problem. That will require a real commitment from industry, much in the same way that the coal industry has supported the cleanup of abandoned coal mines for nearly 40 years. We have introduced legislation, H.R. 963, the *Hardrock Mining Reform and Reclamation Act of 2015*, which would establish a mechanism to raise the necessary funds to clean up this country's abandoned hardrock mines, as well as reform the nation's antiquated hardrock mining laws.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Cleaning Up the Nation's Waste Sites: Markets and Technology Trends, 2004 Edition*, September 2004.

Furthermore, the Bureau of Reclamation's technical review of the Gold King Mine incident identified a number of regulatory gaps related to reentering abandoned mines for the purposes of remediation. Rather than continue trying to cast blame for that incident, we believe that a more productive way forward is to use the lessons learned to ensure it never happens again. That is why we have introduced H.R. 4323, the *Abandoned Mine Reclamation Safety Act*, which would help lower the risk of future uncontrolled releases of wastewater from abandoned mines, ensure that response and notification plans are developed in the event that an uncontrolled release does occur, and incorporate other recommendations from the Gold King Mine technical review.

We are pleased that your recent attention to the Gold King Mine release shows your concern for polluted Western waterways. We ask that you join us in seeking a comprehensive and meaningful solution to the problem of abandoned hardrock mines and schedule a hearing on H.R. 963 and H.R. 4323, and then work with us to advance these bills through the Natural Resources Committee and onto the House Floor.

We look forward to working with you on this issue that is so critical for affected families, communities, and the environment.

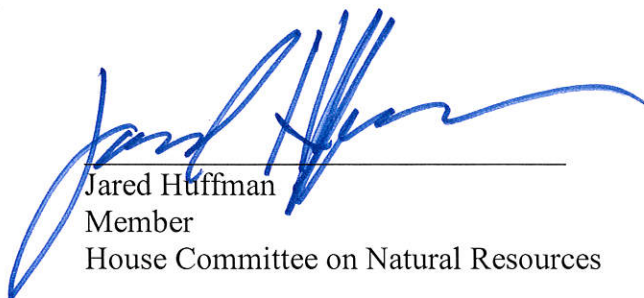
Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



Alan S. Lowenthal
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and
Mineral Resources



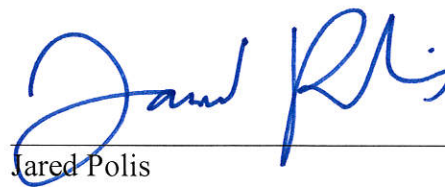
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