

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-107, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 4, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Leader Hoyer, and Leader McCarthy,

As Congress works to address the significant public health and economic crises due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge that future recovery legislation include \$5 billion dollars in federal funding to create jobs in rural communities by reclaiming abandoned hardrock mines. While we believe that comprehensive and meaningful 1872 Mining Law reform is the only way to truly address the long term issues of abandoned hardrock mines, recovery funds could help put mine workers to work immediately, cleaning up the approximately 500,000 abandoned mines that litter the West. In these trying and uncertain times, this solution creates economic possibilities for both out-of-work mine workers as well as frontline communities.

Significant funds for an Abandoned Mine Land (AML) reclamation program for hardrock mines can act as an economic driver. Across the country, the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act's (SMCRA) AML program has reclaimed over \$5.7 billion worth of coal mine pollution and nearly 800,000 acres of damaged land and water. This work cannot be outsourced. The program, funded by a reclamation fee assessed on each ton of coal produced, delivered a total impact of \$778 million to the U.S. economy in FY2013, and supported 4,761 jobs across the country.

However, unlike the coal mining industry, the hardrock mining industry pays neither federal royalties nor reclamation fees, leaving state, local and tribal governments and citizen groups to cobble together scarce resources in order to clean up only a small number of abandoned hardrock mines per year. An influx of hardrock AML funds will not only

create jobs, it will also help restore polluted landscapes, putting degraded lands into productive use and granting relief to communities currently shackled with excessive costs for water treatment of pollution from abandoned mines.

Now is the time for the federal government to provide much-needed resources to fund the cleanup of legacy abandoned hardrock mines in the West—mines that were created before the advent of modern environmental laws and have no known owner. These funds, invested in rural communities, can create a significant number of jobs within the mining economy: the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that for each \$1 million spent on mine cleanup, 14 to 33 new jobs are created.

Western communities face significant burdens associated with these old mines and ultimately need a dedicated reclamation funding stream. At least 40% of the headwaters of Western watersheds are polluted from mining. Abandoned hardrock mines leak millions of gallons of acidic waste laden with arsenic, lead and other harmful contaminants into streams and wetlands across the Western United States. In fact, a 2019 investigation of 43 mining sites under federal oversight, some containing dozens or even hundreds of individual mines, found that more than 50 million gallons of contaminated wastewater streams daily from the sites. To date, there is still no comprehensive inventory of abandoned hardrock mines, no system to prioritize clean-up of the most dangerous of these mines, and almost no funds to pay for it. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), estimated clean-up costs total approximately \$50 billion.

Although federal funding for hardrock abandoned mine cleanup is no substitute for 1872 Mining Law reform and the reclamation fund it would create, any increased funding dedicated to the restoration of old mine sites would massively benefit rural economies, mine workers, and Western lands and waters., while creating crucial job opportunities post-pandemic.

Sincerely,

Alaska's Big Village Network • Black Hills Clean Water Alliance • Center for Biological Diversity • Clean Water Action • Dakota Rural Action • Earthjustice • Earthworks • Endangered Species Coalition • Friends of the Earth • Friends of the Kalmiopsis • Gila Resources Information Project • Idaho Conservation League • Information Network for Responsible Mining • Kalmiopsis Audubon • LEAD Agency, Inc. • League of Conservation Voters • Malach Consulting • Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment • Natural Resources Defense Council • New Mexico Environmental Law Center • Patagonia Area Resource Alliance • Portneuf Resource Council • Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada • Rock Creek Alliance • Save Our Cabinets • Sierra Club • The Lands Council • Weber Sustainability Consulting • Western Colorado Alliance • Western Organization of Resource Councils • Western Watersheds Project