

# HARDROCK MINING IN CALIFORNIA

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 California.

## Mining Activities

As of 2006 mining interests have staked more than 7,792 active mining claims in California, covering an estimated 635,225 acres.

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

San Bernadino County - 175,119 acres, Inyo County - 62,398 acres,  
Sierra County - 43,783 acres, Kern County - 41,463 acres,  
Plumas County - 39,636 acres, and Siskiyou County - 38,251 acres

In 2006, there were 16 active or intermittent hardrock mining operations in California, employing 271 people on site, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, representing 0.0016% of the total employment in the state of California.

Controller	Mine	Commodity	Employment
Gold Mountain Mine	Gold Mountain Mine	Gold Ore	1
Cal Sierra Development Inc	DREDGE 21	Gold Ore	7
CR Briggs	CR Briggs	Gold Ore	11
Glamis Rand Mining Co	Rand Mine	Gold Ore	8
Hahm International Inc	Baxter Mine	Iron Ore	3
Hahm International Inc	Silverlake Mine	Iron Ore	4
Molycorp Inc	Mt. Pass Mine & Mill	Rare Earths Ore	65
Noble Metals Processing LLC	NMP Mariposa Operation	Gold Ore	4
WAYNE'S DRIFT MINE (TUNNEL)	WAYNBO DRIFT MINE WAYNE S. TUNNEL	Gold Ore	1
Western Mesquite Mines, Inc.	Mesquite	Gold Ore	65
American Borate Company	Billie Mine	Misc. Metal Ore NEC	17
Cherry Hill Mining Co.	Cherry Hill Mine	Gold Ore	6
De Maria Mines	DE MARIA MINE	Gold Ore	6
French Gulch (Nevada) Mining Corp	Washington Niagara Mine	Gold Ore	58
Merendon Mining (California) Inc	Discovery Day Mine	Gold Ore	13
Original Sixteen To One Mine Incorporated	Sixteen To One Mine	Gold Ore	2



Above: Mine waste at the Iron Mountain mine Superfund site

## **Area of Specific Concern – Canyon Creek**

Master Petroleum has proposed an open pit gold mine on Canyon Creek, southern gateway to the Trinity Alps Wilderness in northern California. If it becomes operational, the mine would operate for 25 years and process 1 1/2 million tons of soil and gravel right on top of the Creek, while mostly likely releasing high concentrations of mercury left in the soil by 19th century mining. Canyon Creek is eligible for Wild & Scenic River status and is an important salmon and steelhead fishery. Canyon Creek is popular for boating, fishing, and swimming -- which would all be negatively impacted by mining in the area.

## **Abandoned Mines and the Most Polluted Mine Sites**

An estimated 39,000 abandoned mines are scattered across California. The three counties with the most abandoned mines are: Calaveros, San Bernardino, and Siskiyou Counties

More than 4,000 abandoned mines--11 percent of the total--are environmental hazards. The state estimates the costs to cleanup the most dangerous sites at more than \$4 billion.

Of the 79 mines sites identified by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted sites in the country or "Superfund Sites," 6 are located in California. The most polluted mining related sites in California are:

- Atlas Asbestos Mine
- Iron Mountain Mine
- Klau/Buena Vista Mine
- Lava Cap Mine
- Leviathan Mine
- Sulphur Bank Mercury Mine

## **Community Health and Environmental Impacts**

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, metal or hardrock mining in California released over 29 thousand 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 CR Briggs Corp mine, the Western Mesquite Mines Inc. mine, and the Molycorp Inc. Mountain Pass Mine. California ranks 14<sup>th</sup> among the 17 states that reported chemical releases from metal mines in 2005.

## **Loss of California Public Lands to Mining Interests**

As of 2004 an estimated 625,000 acres of public land in California, an area more than half the size of Yosemite 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.

## **California in 1872**

In 1872 when the Mining Law was passed the governor of California was Newton Booth. As of 1870 the population was 560,247 1/60<sup>th</sup> of what it is today.

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