

HARDROCK MINING IN IDAHO

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 Idaho.

Mining Activities

As of 2006 mining interests have staked more than 2,463 active mining claims in Idaho, covering an estimated 260,185 acres.

The five Idaho counties with the most acres claimed on the public lands are:

Idaho County - 41,502 acres, Custer County - 37,660 acres,
Shoshone County - 29,773 acres, Lemhi County - 29,181 acres,
and Owyhee County - 26,109 acres

In 2006, there were 12 active or intermittent hardrock mining operations in Idaho, employing 637 people on site, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, representing 0.084% of the total employment in the state of Idaho.

Controller	Mine	Commodity	Employment
Starr Materials LLC	Butte Gulch Placer	Gold Ore	8
Thompson Creek Metals Co.	Thompson Creek Mining Co	Molybdenum Ore	252
Caldera LLC	McKinley Mine	Gold Ore	0
Crescent Inc	Crescent Mine	Silver Ore	0
DDR Holdings LLC	Pope Shenon Mine	Copper Ore NEC	0
Gold Pan Dan's	Bond Mine	Gold Ore	0
Hecla Mining Company	Lucky Friday	Silver Ore	195
New Jersey Mining Company	Golden Chest Project	Gold Ore	3
New Jersey Mining Company	New Jersey Mine & Mill	Gold Ore	2
Placer Mining Corporation	BUNKER HILL MINE	Lead-Zinc Ore	9
Sterling Mining Company	Sunshine Mine	Silver Ore	21
U.S. Silver - Idaho, Inc.	Galena	Silver Ore	147



Left: Hecla's closed Grouse Creek mine. The mine started leaking cyanide soon after it opened

Area of Specific Concern – Atlanta Gold Mine

A large open pit, cyanide-leach gold mine, the Atlanta Gold Mine, has been proposed upstream of the City of Boise. Concerned citizens are worried about the potential impacts to water quality, recreation and the area's blue ribbon trout fishery.

Abandoned Mines and the Most Polluted Mine Sites

The Idaho Department of Lands estimates that there are between 8,000 and 9,000 abandoned mines in Idaho. The four counties with the most abandoned mines are:

Blaine, Lemhi, Shoshone, and Custer Counties

The state estimates that it will cost nearly \$50 million to mitigate safety hazards, such as open mine shafts. The state has no estimate of the costs to clean up water pollution or other environmental problems.

Of the 79 mines sites identified by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted sites in the country or "Superfund Sites," 3 are located in Idaho. They are the Bunker Hill complex, Eastern Michaud Flats Contamination, Monsanto Chemical processing facility.

Community Health and Environmental Impacts

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, metal or hardrock mining in Idaho released over 19.1 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 Helca Mining Co Lucky Friday Mine Unit, the Coeur Silver Valley Inc mine, and the Thompson Creek Mining Co mine. Idaho ranks 7th among the 17 states that reported chemical releases from metal mines in 2005.

Loss of Idaho Public Lands to Mining Interests

As of 2004 an estimated 200,000 acres of public land in Idaho, 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.

Idaho in 1872

In 1872 when the Mining Law was passed Idaho was not even a state and would not join the Union until 1890. As of 1870 the population of Idaho was between 14,999 and 17,804. The exact population is not known because the territory did not have clearly defined borders.

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

For more information about the 1872 Mining Law, go to www.earthworksaction.org