

# HARDROCK MINING IN NEW MEXICO

In 2007-2008, Congress will be considering changes to the antiquated Mining Law of 1872, which governs how gold, copper 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 about mining in New Mexico.

## Mining Activities

As of December, 2006, there are over 6,500 active mining claims in New Mexico, covering an estimated 170,231 acres.

Five New Mexico counties have more than 10,000 acres claimed.

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Grant County, 51,102 acres claimed    | Sierra County, 19,764 acres claimed     |
| Lincoln County, 16,405 acres claimed  | Rio Arriba County, 12,653 acres claimed |
| McKinley County, 11,403 acres claimed |   |



The top owner of mining claims in New Mexico is Freeport MacMoRan/Phelps Dodge, an international mining company.

The estimated cost for reclaiming the Freeport MacMoRan/Phelps Dodge Chino copper mine, pictured at left, exceeds half a billion dollars, based on state estimates. The mine covers 9,000 acres.

New Mexico has six operating hardrock mines within its borders, which produce mostly copper and molybdenum, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration. The only company to own more than one mine in New Mexico is Freeport MacMoRan/Phelps Dodge, which owns three mines.

According to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, employment at hardrock mine sites in New Mexico was 1288 people in 2006, or 0.014% of the total employment in the state.

| Operator                       | Mine           | Commodity  | Employment  |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| Freeport MacMoRan/Phelps Dodge | Chino          | Copper     | 493         |
| Freeport MacMoRan/Phelps Dodge | Tyrone         | Copper     | 440         |
| Molycorp                       | Questa         | Molybdenum | 330         |
| Freeport MacMoRan/Phelps Dodge | Cobre          | Copper     | 13          |
| St. Cloud Mining               | Lordsburg Mine | Gold       | 12          |
| Royal Minerals                 | Center Mine    | Gold       | 3 (in 2002) |

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

The State of New Mexico estimates that between 10,000 and 20,000 abandoned mines exist statewide, although a comprehensive inventory has not been completed.

The counties with the most abandoned mines are Grant, McKinley, and Sierra.

The state does not have dedicated funding for cleaning up pollution from abandoned mines. The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Bureau gets funding from the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act to mitigate only physical hazards at abandoned hardrock mines.

Of the 79 mines sites identified by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted sites in the country, or “superfund” site, four are located in New Mexico.

1. Molycorp molybdenum mine, near Questa, New Mexico
2. Cimarron Mining Corporation Site, Carrizozo, New Mexico
3. Homestake Mining Company, Milan, New Mexico
4. United Nuclear Corporation, Church Rock, New Mexico

## **Community Health and Environmental Impacts**

Mining pollutes New Mexico's skies and waterways, spoils public lands for ranching, recreation, and hunting and fishing, and destroys wildlife habitat. Mining has disturbed 19,000 acres in New Mexico.

Mining also emits toxic pollutants into the state's skies and waterways. New Mexico ranked 11th among the 17 states in which mining companies reported toxic emissions in 2005, the most recent year for which data is available.

## **Loss of New Mexico's Public Lands to Mining Interests**

More than 55,000 acres or 86 square miles of public lands in New Mexico have already been sold to private interests for either \$2.50 or \$5.00 per acre. This heavily subsidized sale of public lands was authorized under the federal 1872 Mining Law.

## **New Mexico in 1872**

Gold was first discovered in New Mexico in 1828 in the Ortiz Mountains south of Santa Fe. In 1872 the governor of New Mexico was Marsh Giddings. In 1870 New Mexico's population was 90,573, compared to 1,928,384 today, according to the U.S. Census.

New Mexico didn't become a state until 1912.

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