

Hardrock Mining in Montana

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 Montana.

Mining Claims:

Mining interests control approximately 11,609 mining claims on public lands in Montana, covering roughly 257,467 acres.¹ The number of mining claims staked on public lands in Montana has increased by 7% from 2002 to September 2006.² Of the top five claim holders in Montana, three out of five are controlled by foreign corporations.

Claim Holder	# of Claims	Estimated Acreage
Beartooth Platinum Corp. (Canada)	1,055	21,186
Norilsk (Russia)	849	15,567
Sterling Mining (now Revett) (Canada)	444	7,744
Graymont Western Inc. (U.S. – Salt Lake City)	383	7,474
ASARCO/Grupo Mexico (Mexico)	346	7,117

Source: http://www.ewg.org/sites/mining_google/US/index.php

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

Sweet Grass County 30,419 acres, Jefferson County 28,920 acres, Beaverhead County 23,902 acres, Madison County 21,402 acres, and Broadwater County 19,817 acres

Mining Operations:

Montana has twelve major hardrock mines within its borders at various stages of operation or reclamation/closure, employing 2,273 on site, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, representing 0.53% of the total employment in the state of Montana. Many of these are located on a combination of patented and unpatented lands. Three new major mines are proposed, including the Rock Creek and Montanore Projects proposed on Forest Service and patented (private) land in northwest Montana, and the Elkhorn Project proposed on private land in Jefferson County.

Controller	Mine	Commodity	Employment
Golden Sunlight Mines Inc	GOLDEN SUNLIGHT MINES, INC	Gold Ore	155
Holcim (US) Inc	Black Butte Mine	Iron Ore	4
Montana Resources	Continental Mine	Copper Ore NEC	352

Montana Tunnels Mining Inc	Montana Tunnels Mining Inc	Gold Ore	109
Tracy Fortner	Confederate Gulch	Gold Ore	2
Coronado Resources Inc	Victoria / Madison Gold	Copper Ore NEC	2
Genesis Inc.	Genesis Inc., Troy Mine	Copper Ore NEC	159
Glovin- Lipman, LLC	Little Lode	Gold Ore	0
Mines Management, Inc.	Montanore Project	Silver Ore	8
Small Mine Development, LLC	Golden Sunlight Underground Mine	Gold Ore	20
Stillwater Mining Company	STILLWATER MINE	Platinum Group Ore	961
Stillwater Mining Company	EAST BOULDER MINE	Platinum Group Ore	501

Abandoned Mines and the Most Polluted Mine Sites:

The Montana Mine Waste Cleanup Bureau estimates that 6,000 abandoned mines exist statewide. Of the total, an estimated 350 sites are known water pollution sources. Montana has some dedicated funding for abandoned mine cleanup, which may be used for water treatment as well as repair of physical hazards, such as open mine shafts. However, there are no federal funds for abandoned mine cleanup contributed from the hardrock mining industry.

Of the 79 mining related sites identified by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted sites in the country, or “Superfund” site, nine are located in Montana.³

1. Anaconda Company Smelter, Anaconda, Montana
2. East Helena Site, East Helena, Montana
3. Barker Hughesville Mining District, Great Falls, Montana
4. Basin Mining Area, Basin, Montana
5. Carpenter Snow Creek Mining District, Neihart, Montana
6. Libby Asbestos, Libby, Montana
7. Milltown Reservoir Sediments, Milltown, Montana
8. Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area, Montana
9. Upper Ten Mile Creek Mining Area, Montana



Acid runoff from abandoned mine.

Community Health and Environmental Impacts:

Hardrock mining has polluted Montana’s skies and waterways and spoiled public lands for ranching, recreation, and hunting and fishing, and destroyed wildlife habitat. Several mines have resulted in such severe water quality problems that they will generate contaminated runoff for centuries.

- The Beal Mountain Mine, located in the Deerlodge National Forest, has polluted neighboring streams and native trout



Contaminated runoff from Zortman

populations with harmful amounts of selenium.⁴ In 2003 the Forest Service pulled the mine into a federal “time critical” cleanup program because the mine presents a “substantial endangerment to human health and the environment.”⁵ Mine regulators say that this is a mine that they will never be able to “walk away” from.

- The Zortman Landusky mine on BLM land just south of the Fort Belknap Reservation has polluted streams and groundwater throughout the Little Rocky Mountains. Despite significant reclamation, the mine will generate contaminated run-off in perpetuity – an on-going threat to important tribal water resources.⁶

- The Kendall mine, which operated from 1989-1995, has polluted streams and groundwater in the Moccasin Mountains of central Montana, causing six downstream ranching families to sue the company for impacts to their agricultural property.⁷ The mine was originally permitted on BLM land, however the BLM entered into a land-swap agreement, and the mine is now on private land – leaving the regulatory responsibility and financial liability to the State of Montana.



Contaminated water threatens Fort Belknap water resources.

- According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, over 2,200 miles of Montana’s rivers and streams cannot be put to their beneficial use (e.g., drinking, fishing, swimming etc.) due to pollution from abandoned mines.

Loss of Montana’s Public Lands to Mining Interests:

In Montana, the hardrock mining industry has acquired the title to an estimated 404,469 acres of land previously owned by the public and rich in gold, silver, and other precious metals and minerals.⁸

For example: Stillwater Mining Company, at the time a joint venture between Chevron and Manville Sales Corp, gained the title to 1,800 acres of national forest land in Montana at \$5 an acre.⁹ For \$10,000 the company gained platinum and palladium reserves worth more than \$35 billion, a return of \$3.5 million for every one dollar received by the federal government.¹⁰ The mine is now owned by Russian company Norilsk.

Montana in 1872:

Montana became a Territory in 1864. The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Nez Perce War occurred in 1877. There were approximately ten thousand people in the region by 1865, compared to Montana's 2006 population of 944,632. Montana became a state in 1899.

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

¹ Environmental Working Group, Who Owns the West? Mining Database, from BLM data, 2006.

http://www.ewg.org/sites/mining_google/US/index.php

² BLM Public Land Statistics, 1996-2006

³ <http://www.epa.gov/region08/superfund/mtsf.html>

⁴ La Marr, Tim, Reviewed by Dennis Lemly. Aquatic Hazard Assessment for Selenium in the German Gulch Subwatershed: Based on 2001 and 2002 Data. January 2003.

⁵ Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Action Memorandum for Beal Mountain Mine Time Critical Removal. July 2003.

⁶ U.S. BLM, Action Memorandum for Zortman and Landusky Mines Time Critical Removal. June 2004.

⁷ Landowners sue mine over environmental damage”, Billings Gazette, Oct. 21, 2001

⁸ EWG. “Who Owns the West? Mining Database, from BLM data 2006. <http://www.ewg.org/sits/mining>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.