

# HARDROCK MINING IN WASHINGTON

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 Washington.

## Mining Activities

As of 2006 mining interests have staked more than 639 active mining claims in Washington, covering an estimated 50,632 acres.

There are five counties with the more than 4,000 acres claimed on public land:

Pend Oreille County 11,689 acres, Skamania County 7,671 acres,  
Okanogan County 6,621 acres, Kittitas County 5,177, and  
Ferry County 4,386 acres

In 2006, there were 6 active or intermittent hardrock mining operations in Washington, employing 257 people on site, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, representing 0.0094% percent of the total employment in the state of Washington.

Controller	Mine	Commodity	Employment
Dawson Trucking Inc	White Rock Quarry	Misc. Metal Ore NEC	2
Kinross Gold Corp Kettle River Operations	Kettle River Mill Site	Gold Ore	31
Liberty Mining & Exploration LLC	Swauk Creek Mine	Gold Ore	8
Crown Resources-Kettle River Operations	Buckhorn Mine	Gold Ore	8
Kinross Gold Corp Kettle River Operations	K-2 Mine Site	Gold Ore	24
Teck Cominco American Inc	Pend Oreille Mine	Lead-Zinc Ore	184



Above: Buckhorn Mountain, sight of the proposed Buckhorn Mountain mine

## **Area of Specific Concern – The Green River Watershed**

A mining company wants to develop a massive mine at the headwaters of the Green River and within the 1980 blast zone of Mount S. Helens – one of the world's most active volcanoes. The mining company has applied for a mining lease on Forest Service lands that were donated to the government by the Trust for Public Land specifically for conservation purposes. The company also wants to incorporate mining claims to the north, regulated under the Mining Law of 1872. The Forest Service has determined that the Green River is eligible for protection as a "Wild and Scenic River," noting the "scientific, geologic, recreational and scenic resources of this area and the Green River are of national significance and have been determined to be outstandingly remarkable." It also supports a state fish hatchery, and contributes water to municipal water supplies downstream.

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

The Washington Department of Ecology estimates that there are 3,800 abandoned mines in Washington. The Counties with the most abandoned mines or with the largest population centers near them are Ferry, Okanogan, Snohomish, and Stevens Counties.

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 Washington's Mead, Pierce, and Spokane counties.

## **Community Health and Environmental Impacts**

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, metal or hardrock mining in Washington released over 14.5 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 Climax Molybdenum- Henderson mine and mill and the Cripple Creek and Victor mine. Washington ranks 9th among the 17 states that reported chemical releases from metal mines in 2005.

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

As of 2004 an estimated 37,000 acres of public land in Washington has 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.

## **Washington in 1872**

In 1872 when the mining law was passed, Washington was still a territory and wouldn't join the Union until 1889. Elisha Peyre Ferry became territorial governor in April of 1872. As of 1870 the population of Washington was 23,955.

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