

HARDROCK MINING IN SOUTH DAKOTA

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 South Dakota.

Mining Activities

As of 2006 mining interests have staked more than 178 active mining claims in South Dakota, covering an estimated 22,036 acres.

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

Lawrence County 9,754 acres, Custer County 6,128 acres,
Pennington County 4,139 acres, Butte County 1,140 acres,
and Fall River County 695 acres

In 2006, there were 2 active or intermittent hardrock mining operations in South Dakota, employing 114 people on site, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration, representing 0.027% percent of the total employment in the state of South Dakota.

| Controller | Mine | Commodity | Employment |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Wharf Resources (Usa) Inc | THE WHARF MINE | Gold Ore | 106 |
| Pete Lien & Sons Inc | CF & I PIT | Iron Ore | 8 |

Abandoned Mines and the Most Polluted Mine Sites

The Abandoned Mine Lands Advisory Committee estimates that there are 900 abandoned mines in South Dakota. The three counties with the most abandoned mines are:

Fall River, Lawrence, and Pennington Counties.

The clean up at abandoned uranium mines in Harding County will cost an estimated \$20 million, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Hazardous materials contaminate 12 bluffs in the Sioux Ranger District of Custer National Forest, said Laurie Walters-Clark, on-scene coordinator of the project. In the 1950s, uranium mining claims were filed on the 65,000 acres of the North Cave Hills, South Cave Hills and Slim Buttes areas. By 1965, the mining companies had left. (source: Aberdeen News July 21, 2005)

Open pit cyanide leach mines in South Dakota have caused extensive water pollution due to cyanide spills, acid mine drainage or the leaching of toxic metals. For example, the Gilt Edge Mine, which is located at the headwaters of municipal water supplies of the northern Black Hills, has caused such severe pollution that water from the mine will have to be captured and treated in perpetuity.



Of the 79 mines sites identified by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency as the most polluted sites in the country or "Superfund Sites," one is located in South Dakota. It is the Gilt Edge Mine, near Deadwood. Some of the mine drainage from the Gilt Edge site is pictured at the left.

Community Health and Environmental Impacts

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, metal or hardrock mining in South Dakota released over 1.2 million pounds of toxins in 2005, the most recent year for which information is available. The mine that released the most toxins was Wharf Resources which released 1,034,901 pounds of lead and lead compounds. South Dakota ranks 13 among the 17 states that reported chemical releases from metal mines in 2005.

Loss of South Dakota Public Lands to Mining Interests

As of 2004 an estimated 105,533 acres of public land in South Dakota, 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.

South Dakota in 1872

In 1872 when the Mining Law was passed, South Dakota was a territory and would not join the Union until 1889. John Albyne Burbank was the territorial governor and the population was only 11,776.

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

Prepared by Cathy Carlson and Jonathan Schwartz, EARTHWORKS, July 2007
For more information about the 1872 Mining Law, go to www.earthworksaction.org