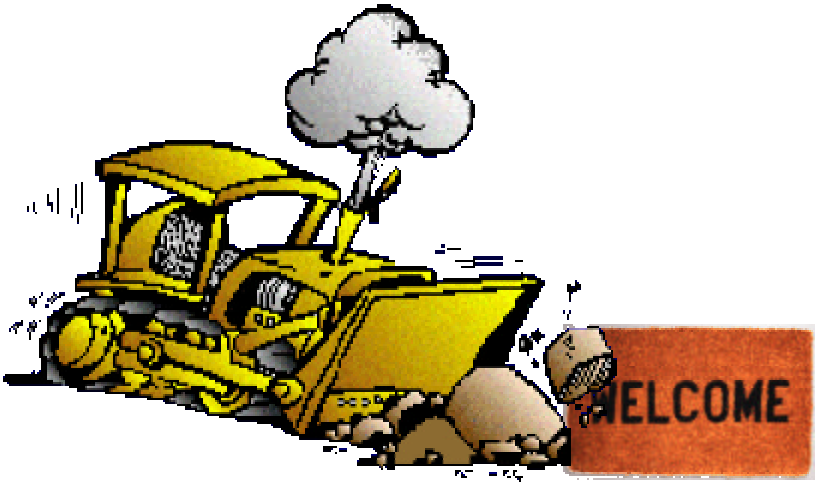
MINERAL POLICY CENTER

Protecting Communities and the Environment

DON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR…

1872 Mining Law Fact #10



When a multinational mining company wants to dig an open-pit mine on public land belonging to U.S. taxpayers, local land managers roll out the red carpet.

That's because hardrock mining for gold, silver, copper and other precious metals is considered to be the "highest and best use" of public lands under the outdated 1872 Mining Law—outweighing all other uses including hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, forestry and mining for coal, oil and gas.

When it approved the Rock Creek silver and copper mine in Montana's Cabinet Wilderness Area, the U.S. Forest Service claimed it had no choice because of the 1872 Mining Law. The fact that downstream Idaho communities strongly opposed the mine, which would harm threatened grizzly bears and pollute wilderness lakes, made no difference.

Endangering wildlife and leaching poisons and heavy metals into streams and aquifers just isn't neighborly. Yet the Mining Law lays out the welcome mat for mining companies, while taxpayers and communities play the doormat.

Part of a series on the 1872 Mining Law, highlighting impacts on taxpayers, community health, and water resources—and the need for meaningful reform.

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