

Alaska Wilderness League ▪ American Bird Conservancy ▪ American Rivers ▪ Campaign for America's Wilderness ▪ Center for Biological Diversity ▪ Center for Native Ecosystems ▪ Clean Water Action ▪ Colorado Citizens Against ToxicWaste, Inc. ▪ Colorado Conservation Alliance ▪ Earthjustice ▪ EARTHWORKS ▪ Environment America ▪ Environmental Working Group ▪ Grand Canyon Trust ▪ Great Basin Resource Watch ▪ High Country Citizens' Alliance ▪ Idaho Conservation League ▪ League of Conservation Voters ▪ Natural Resources Defense Council ▪ National Parks Conservation Association ▪ New Mexico Wilderness Alliance ▪ Oregon Wild ▪ Pew Campaign for Responsible Mining ▪ Sierra Club ▪ Sheep Mountain Alliance ▪ The Wilderness Society ▪ Western Organization of Resource Councils

A Golden Opportunity to Protect the Grand Canyon and Reform the 1872 Mining Law

Dear Senator,

After 135 years, the Senate is poised to reform the Mining Law of 1872 that governs the extraction of hardrock minerals, such as gold, silver, and copper, on public land. With the growing number of new claims and a mining company set to drill three miles from the Grand Canyon, our treasured places cannot wait any longer. The above signed groups and their members urge you to sign onto a letter from Senators Cantwell and Wyden outlining the types of protections our nation's natural treasures and sensitive lands deserve.

The 1872 Law still gives metal mining on many public lands special priority over recreation, ranching, hunting, fishing and conservation. It allows mining companies—even those that are foreign-owned—to take precious resources from public lands virtually for free, unlike the oil, gas and coal industries that have been paying royalties for decades. For example, British owned Vane Minerals has the permits to start exploratory drilling three miles from a lookout point on the south rim of the Grand Canyon. Due to the Mining Law of 1872, the Forest Service reported that they had no choice but to approve the permits. Over the past five years, mining companies have staked more than 800 claims on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

To protect both our public lands and the taxpayers the Senate's version of the hardrock mining reform bill should:

- **Balance Mining with Other Important Uses of Public Lands:** Real reform should give land managers the authority to reject mine proposals that create serious conflicts with other important public needs.
- **Protect National Parks and Monuments from Mining:** Though mining is generally prohibited in National Parks and Monuments, these treasures can be affected by mining nearby. Many mining claims are close to natural treasures such as the Grand Canyon, and mine operations could impair the public's enjoyment of such areas. The government must be able to deny mining proposals that would damage the natural resources of our National Parks and Monuments.
- **Protect Special Places From New Mining Claims:** Some areas are too special or too vulnerable for mining, and government policy should stop inviting conflict by allowing new claim-staking in these areas.
- **Give Local Communities a Voice:** For many western communities, public lands have become an important asset – protecting local drinking water supplies, providing outdoor recreation opportunities or drawing tourists and visitors. Real reform should allow state, local and tribal governments to participate in decisions about the use of public lands for mining. These elected officials should be able to protect sensitive lands in their communities.
- **Establish Environmental Performance and Reclamation Standards and Ensure that Water Quality is Not Degraded:** Where mining is deemed appropriate on our public lands, mining companies should operate to meet environmental performance standards, and they must reclaim disturbed lands and restore water quality rather than leave those problems for state and local taxpayers to manage. Real reform should have solid financial assurance and modern environmental requirements.
- **Accelerate Cleanup of Abandoned Mines:** Just as the oil industry has contributed to the cleanup of leaking underground storage tanks and the coal industry to the cleanup of historic coal mines, the hardrock industry should help bear the cleanup costs for a legacy of nearly half a million abandoned non-coal mines. Cleanup of old, abandoned mines that threaten public safety or the environment should be accelerated, with a large funding share coming from a royalty on hardrock mining operations.

Please contact Joel Merkel in Senator Cantwell's office at 224-3441 or Curt Baranowski in Senator Wyden's office at 224-1301 for more information.

**Join this historic effort to protect the Grand Canyon and make
a modern mining law for a modern time!**