

Mining Reform



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MODERN MINING NEEDS A MODERN LAW

The mining of hardrock minerals—gold, uranium and other metals—on public lands in the West is governed today by the 1872 Mining Act. It has changed little since President Ulysses S. Grant signed it into law to encourage settlement of the West.

This 1872 law—on the books before the light bulb was invented—often gives metal mining special priority over recreation, ranching and conservation. It allows mining companies—even those that are foreign-owned—to take precious resources from public lands virtually for free, yet the oil, gas and coal industries have been paying royalties since the 1920s. And in what is arguably one of the great corporate give-

aways of all time, claimholders can purchase public land at the rock-bottom price of \$5 an acre or less. They do not even have to mine the property, but can use it—and have—to build hotels, condominiums and casinos.

Failure to reform this antiquated statute has proven costly to Americans. Mining is a messy business. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that metal mining has contaminated more than 40 percent of western watersheds. Nearly half a million mine sites await reclamation, and the projected cost to taxpayers for cleaning up the pollution runs upwards of \$50 billion.

A new rush of mining claims in the West is about to make the problem worse.

A recent analysis of government records found a dramatic surge in claims, including hundreds of sites within miles of the Grand Canyon and other notable national parks such as Joshua Tree and Yosemite.

Modern mining needs a modern law. The Pew Environment Group's Campaign for Responsible Mining is a national effort, launched in 2006, to take advantage of a unique opportunity in Congress to reform the 1872 Mining Act. The simple goal of this campaign is to encourage the adoption of a new framework for mining that compensates taxpayers, respects local communities and protects the environment.