



THE BOARD OF BLAINE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

206 FIRST AVENUE SOUTH, SUITE 300

HAILEY, IDAHO 83333

PHONE: (208) 788-5500 FAX: (208) 788-5569

www.blainecounty.org bcc@co.blaine.id.us

Jacob Greenberg, Chairman * Angenie McCleary, Vice-Chair * Dick Fosbury, Commissioner

October 8, 2019

Honorable Raul Grijalva
United States House of Representatives
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

United States House of Representatives
Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee,

We are writing to support HR 2579, the Hardrock Leasing and Reclamation Act of 2019. Hardrock mining is a pillar of western history that enabled communities across the West to establish and grow into the places we call home today. But the industry – and our environmental consciousness – have come a long way since 1872, when the General Mining Act first became law. That's why we, as Blaine County Commissioners, elected officials from Idaho, are calling on Congress to reform this outdated law that continues to govern hardrock mining operations on 350 million acres of public lands at the expense of taxpayers, our local economies and our environment.

Like any industry, the practice of hardrock mining has evolved over the decades, yet the law that governs it has not evolved with it. The 1872 Mining Law was created when mining was largely done by individual prospectors with picks and shovels, not the large-scale operators of today. Moreover, the law prioritizes mining as the best use for public lands – a philosophy that doesn't align with the multi-use approach we apply to our federal lands today, allowing for conservation, outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing, agriculture and energy development all to coexist.


While individual states have enacted various reclamation laws, there are no consistent national standards to ensure that water resources are protected, and communities are consulted before mining moves forward. Furthermore, hardrock mining is exempt from many critical federal regulations, including portions of the Clean Water Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, our federal hazardous waste law.

Hardrock mining is the leading source of toxic pollution in the U.S. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 40 percent of the headwaters of waterways in the western United States are polluted by mining. And every day, abandoned hardrock mines collectively produce about 50 million gallons of polluted water, threatening water supplies of downstream communities. The estimated price to clean up the hundreds of thousands of abandoned hardrock mines across the country is an estimated \$50 billion. With limited resources to accomplish that, and potentially billions more in cleanup costs at active mines, the burden falls to taxpayers, local governments and state agencies, as well as the EPA's Superfund program.

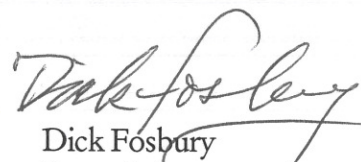
Our invaluable lands and waterways feel the effects of this outdated legislation west-wide, from Arizona's Santa Rita Mountains and Grand Canyon National Park, to Montana's Cabinet Mountains Wilderness to Bears Ears National Monument in Utah. Today we continue to remediate spills into the Boise River, the Salmon River and locally into the East Fork of the Bigwood River in Idaho.

Legislation to reform the 1872 mining law should allow hardrock mining to be balanced with other land uses, expand public land protections, mandate operation and reclamation standards to protect our waterways, create an abandoned mine cleanup program funded by a reclamation fee, abolish patenting and charge a royalty. The United States is the only country that does not charge a royalty for minerals taken from public lands. It is high time that we bring this law into the 21st century to ensure the protection of our taxpayers, our lands and waters, and the local economies that depend on them.

Sincerely,


Jacob Greenberg
Chairman


Angenie McCleary
Vice-Chairman


Dick Fosbury
Commissioner