

September 8, 2015

Dear Members of Congress,

The Gold King mine waste spill into the Animas River in Colorado has focused national media and political attention on a broader issue – the hundreds of thousands of abandoned and inactive mines that are actively polluting surface and groundwater, and occasionally threaten catastrophe. This particular spill was tragic, but it was not an isolated event.

These older mines are inherently problematic today because they were not built or operated with proper reclamation plans or long-term environmental liabilities in mind. Today, our mining technology and understanding of the industry's impacts are vastly superior to that of 150 years ago. Yet rather than use that knowledge to better protect the environment we are instead building mines thousands of times larger than Gold King that we know will pollute water for thousands of years and require expensive water treatment forever.

Who will pay for this liability ten, twenty, or thirty generations from now, when the mining company once responsible is no longer legally identifiable and no private or corporate money is available? Under the 1872 Mining Law, future taxpayers will shoulder this enormous financial burden. This is one reason among many why we urgently need to modernize this law. If mining companies cannot clean up after themselves, they should not be allowed to operate in the first place.

Many inactive mines are not abandoned. They have current owners who should be held accountable for the environmental performance of their properties. Others, however, were left behind long ago and have no responsible parties to be charged with cleanup. Modernizing our mining law should tackle both scenarios.

We need full accountability for those who own or once owned problematic mines, and to ensure that truly abandoned mines can be cleaned up through a dedicated funding stream. Under the 1872 Mining Law, federally owned hardrock minerals remain the only category of extracted resources that can be taken for free from public lands. This anything-goes, nineteenth century approach to mining must end. Modernizing the 1872 Mining Law means:

- Protecting watersheds by creating a dedicated funding source for abandoned mine cleanup;
- Protecting future generations from perpetual mining pollution;
- Protecting communities' health and economies, and the environment, by allowing federal land managers to balance mining with other potential land uses, and to deny inappropriate mine proposals;
- Establishing strong environmental standards for hardrock mining operations and reclamation;
- Provide a fair return to the American taxpayer for the minerals extracted from our public lands.

Approximately 40% of western watersheds are polluted by mining, much of it from the estimated 500,000 abandoned and inactive mines that litter the West. The Gold King

spill has shed a spotlight on the urgency of the risk that mining -- past and present -- poses to our drinking water, our watersheds, and our economy.

Fortunately, Congressman Raul Grijalva and Senator Martin Heinrich are taking the lead on hardrock mining and reclamation reform, and we applaud their efforts. We call on you to stand behind meaningful mining law reform that would bring real solutions to the problems posed by both historic and modern day mining operations.

Sincerely,

Alaska Inter-Tribal Council	Anchorage, AK	Delice Calcote
American Rivers	Washington, DC	Jim Bradley
Amigos Bravos	Taos, NM	Rachel Conn
Arizona Mining Reform Coalition	Tucson, AZ	Roger Featherstone
Brooks Range Council	Fairbanks, AK	John Gaedeke
Center for Alt. Mining Development Policy	La Crosse, WI	Al Gedicks
Clean Water Action	Washington, DC	John Noel
Clean Water Alliance	Rapid City, SD	Lilias Jarding
Colorado Citizens Against Toxic Waste	Canon City, CO	Sharyn Cunningham
Copper Country Alliance	Copper Center, AK	Ruth McHenry
Earthworks	Washington, DC	Pete Dronkers
Environment America	Boston, MA	John Rumpler
Environment New Mexico	Albuquerque, NM	Sanders Moore
Environmental Protection Information Center	Arcata, CA	Natalynne DeLapp
Fair Jewelry Action	Santa Fe, NM	Mark Choyt
Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness	Minneapolis, MN	Betsy Daub
Friends of the Clearwater	Moscow, ID	Gary McFarlane
Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest	Duluth, MN	Kristen Larsen
Friends of the Earth	Washington, DC	Marissa Knodel
Friends of the Kalmiopsis	Grants Pass, OR	Barbara Ullian
Gila Resources Information Project	Silver City, NM	Allyson Siwik
Golden Eagle Audubon Society	Boise, ID	Pam Conley
Grand Canyon Trust	Flagstaff, AZ	Anne Mariah Tapp
Grand Riverkeeper	Vinita, OK	Earl Hatley
Great Basin Resource Watch	Reno, NV	John Hadder
Great Old Broads for Wilderness	Durango, CO	Shelley Silbert
Groundwater Awareness League	Green Valley, AZ	Nancy Freeman
High Country Conservation Advocates	Crested Butte, CO	Allison Melton
Idaho Conservation League	Boise, ID	John Robison
Idaho Rivers United	Boise, ID	Mark Blaiser
Information Network for Responsible Mining	Norwood, CO	Jennifer Thurston
Inter-Tribal Association of Arizona	Phoenix, AZ	Verna Monenerkit

Klamath Forest Alliance	Orleans, CA	Kimberly Baker
Laguna-Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment	Laguna/Acoma, NM	Petuuche Gilbert
League of Conservation Voters	Washington, DC	Madeleine Foote
Multicultural Alliance for a safe Environment	Albuquerque, NM	Susan Gordon
National Parks Conservation Association	Washington, DC	Ani Kame'enui
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light	Albuquerque, NM	Joan Brown
New Mexico Wilderness League	Albuquerque, NM	Mark Allison
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness	Ely, MN	Rachel Garwin
Okanogan Highlands Alliance	Tonasket, WA	David Kliegman
Patagonia Area Resource Alliance	Patagonia, AZ	Wendy Russell
Powder River Basin Resource Council	Sheridan, WY	Shannon Anderson
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada	Reno, NV	Bob Fulkerson
Rachel Carson Council	Bethesda, MD	Robert Musil
River Network	Boulder, CO	Nicole Silk
River Without Borders	Juneau, AK	Will Patric
Rock Creek Alliance	Sandpoint, ID	Mary Crowe Costello
Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative	Nederland, CO	Rosalind McClellan
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council	Alamosa, CO	Christine Canaly
Save Our Blue Sky Waters	Duluth, MN	Lori Andresen
Save Our Cabinets	Heron, MT	Mary Crowe Costello
Save the Scenic Santa Ritas	Tucson, AZ	Gayle Hartmann
Sheep Mountain Alliance	Telluride, CO	Leigh Robertson
Sierra Club	Washington, DC	Athan Manuel
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance	Salt Lake City, UT	Scott Groene
Tallahassee Area Community	Fremont County, CO	Catherine Meyrick
The Wilderness Society	Washington, DC	Alan Rowsome
Tucson Audubon Society	Tucson, AZ	Karen Fogas
Turquoise Trail Preservation Trust	Golden, NM	Karen Yank
Western Colorado Congress	Grand Junction, CO	Rein van West
Western Environmental Law Center	Taos, NM	Erik Schlenker-Goodrich
WildEarth Guardians	Santa Fe, NM	Timothy Ream
Wilderness Workshop	Carbondale, CO	Will Roush