



Protecting National Parks from Mining Threats

National Parks at Risk: Climate Change, the Energy Transition & Critical Minerals

Our national parks bring us closer to nature and wildlife, and with climate change threatening these special places, it's more important than ever to protect them while transitioning to a renewable energy economy. The renewable energy transition requires critical minerals, which presents a challenge: how can we secure essential minerals while protecting national parks and nearby communities?

While recycling minerals and reducing demand are essential strategies, the energy transition will require more minerals than are currently available. Some new mining will be necessary, and recent policy actions have increased the push to develop new minerals domestically. However, a patchwork of outdated laws, including the Mining Law of 1872, leave our national park system and surrounding communities vulnerable to mining risks like water contamination and habitat loss. Without commonsense reforms, the push for mining new critical minerals could undermine the beloved places we've set aside to steward for future generations.

Mining on Public Lands and National Parks

National parks and newly designated conservation areas, such as national monuments, prohibit *new* mining claims within their boundaries. However, over **3,700 places** within these protected areas still allow for mining.

Unlike every other use of public lands, the specific location of a mine claim is largely left up to the mine claim holder's choice. This drastically limits the ability of public land managers, like the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service, to protect high-value conservation lands. As a result, there are over **120,000 mining claims within 30 miles of national parks and monuments**. While a mining claim does not guarantee an active mine will be developed, it is an exceedingly easy first step; a mine claim has a nominal annual fee and few restrictions considering potential harm to surrounding landscapes or communities.

This problem stems from the 1872 Mining Law, which has allowed:

- Mine claim holders pay less than \$10 per acre to hold public lands under a mine claim.
- \$300 billion worth of minerals have been removed from public lands since 1872, with mining companies paying \$0 in royalties for use of a public resource – a practice unique to the United States.
- The leasing and royalty system for coal, oil and gas was updated over a century ago to better balance public land management and protect public taxpayers.

MINING CLAIMS BY THE NUMBERS

3,767

CLAIMS INSIDE
NATIONAL PARKS AND
NATIONAL MONUMENTS

123,788

CLAIMS WITHIN 30 MILES OF
NATIONAL PARKS &
MONUMENTS

492,178

CLAIMS LOCATED ON
NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS

Meanwhile, an outdated mine claim leasing system continues to harm protected public lands. Mining interests are exploring and developing new mines within and directly adjacent to national parks in the California Desert, Northern Arizona and Southeast Utah.

Mojave National Preserve	Canyonlands National Park	Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni
In Mojave National Preserve, a foreign company is seeking to re-open the Colosseum Mine, which has been dormant since the 1990s, and destroying 100-year-old desert plant species.	In southeast Utah, interest in lithium extraction is driving development near Canyonlands National Park, a mecca for the outdoor recreation economy and the convergence of three major western rivers of the Colorado River Basin.	In Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni National Monument, directly adjacent to Grand Canyon National Park, the Pinyon Plain Uranium Mine threatens to contaminate water sources of the Havasupai Tribe and springs within the Grand Canyon.

From the California Desert to Southeastern Utah, a large, connected network of conservation landscapes preserves multiple ecosystems and conservation values. Unfortunately, this region is left unprotected from existing and future mining claims.

The mining industry is actively working to expand their rights under the 1872 Mining Law by advocating for the Mining Regulatory Clarity Act (MRCA), which would intensify the threat of mining to the national park system. Currently, the 1872 Mining Law requires mine claim holders prove the discovery of a valuable mineral to validate a claim. The MRCA would remove this requirement and automatically validate claims, making it even easier to lock up public lands and limit other important public land uses.

IMPROVING THE CLAIM SYSTEM TO PROTECT PARKS

National parks are places that bring us together even in divided times. Poll after poll shows Americans overwhelmingly support protecting national parks on both sides of the political aisle, united behind clean air, clean water, and healthy wildlife. NPCA is committed to securing bipartisan victories for the parks with commonsense mining law reform and mobilizing park supporters to protect these cherished landscapes. Now, more than ever, our parks need your help.

For more information:
Beau Kiklis
Associate Director
Energy and Landscape Conservation Program
bkiklis@npca.org