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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Hardrock Mining Reform Seeks to Level the Playing Field**

*Legislation Introduced with dual House and Senate Press Conference and House Natural Resources Subcommittee Hearing*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – During a press conference this morning, Congressman Grijalva (D-AZ), Lowenthal (D-CA), and Senator Udall (D-NM) announced the reintroduction of their respective legislation to reform hardrock mining. The legislation would replace the General Mining Law of 1872, which is still in effect and governs mining for hardrock minerals such as gold, copper and uranium on publicly owned lands. The press conference was followed by a House Natural Resources subcommittee hearing featuring western voices urging reform, including Indigenous activists and leaders from Alaska, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico; a former Black Hills gold miner; a current county commissioner from Colorado; and members of the Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition.

Hardrock mining on our public lands is still governed by a law that was created when Ulysses S. Grant was president. Under the 1872 Mining Law, the hardrock mining industry can extract gold, silver, copper and other minerals from public land for free, without paying any royalties, unlike the coal, oil and gas industries. The hardrock industry is also elevated in land use status ahead of other uses of public lands, yet is known to be one of the most heavily polluting. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that roughly [40 percent of western headwaters](#) have been contaminated by acid mine drainage from hardrock mine sites.

"Pick axes are no longer standard equipment for hardrock mining, yet the 1872 Mining Law still governs hardrock mining on public lands today. American taxpayers will see the benefits when this antiquated rule is updated by the Hardrock Leasing and Reclamation Act of 2019," said Linda Weiss, Western Organization of Resource Councils Board Chair. "The House bill would transition the archaic law to a leasing system resembling that for industries such as oil, gas, and coal. Gold, silver and other hardrock minerals currently yield no royalties, but that can change. Abandoned sites can be cleaned up; special lands can be off-limits; and taxpayers won't be shafted."

Not only do taxpayers lose because mining companies do not pay a royalty to extract minerals while making millions of dollars per year, they have also been left with hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines that will cost an estimated [cleanup cost as high as \\$54 billion](#).

“Since the 1872 bill was passed, hardrock mining has received preferential treatment while the environment and the taxpayer have suffered,” said Alan Anderson, a retired U.S. Forest Service Ranger and former Black Hills gold miner. “Mining is important to our country for many reasons, but in this changed world, it is time for a new mining law. The Hardrock Leasing and Reclamation Act of 2019 would increase protections for our lands and waters, and give the public more choice in how our precious lands will be used. It will also try to ensure that some mining profits go to practical land mitigation, restoration and the cleanup of past excesses. It makes sense. It’s time.”

The Udall bill directs the Department of Interior to review areas that may be unsuitable for mining and should be withdrawn from mining eligibility. The Grijalva/Lowenthal bill, H.R. 2579, specifically outlines land and water designations where mining operations should be off-limits, such as national parks, monuments, and wild and scenic rivers. Both pieces of legislation also require meaningful consultation between federal government agencies and tribes prior to the permitting of mining activities that will impact tribal communities. The House bill draws upon Grijalva’s recently-introduced RESPECT Act ([H.R. 2689](#)).

Although the Udall and Grijalva/Lowenthal bills have different approaches, both would update the current law to provide a structure that provides financial and environmental certainty to both corporations and taxpayers, as well as a dedicated hardrock minerals reclamation fund. Notably, both bills also end the preferred status that hardrock mining enjoys on public lands, making hardrock mining equal with other land uses such as recreation, grazing, and energy development.

Now is the time to #ReformMining, #Undo1872, and bring hardrock mining into the 21st century.

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*The Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) is a network of grassroots organizations that span seven of the Western states with more than 15,000 members. Many WORC members live on lands overlying and neighboring federal, tribal, state and privately owned oil and gas deposits, and experience numerous impacts due to federal oil and gas production. Headquartered in Billings, Montana, WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.*