



Conservation Action Alert

Prevent Potentially Disastrous Mining Proposals in the Patagonia Mountains Important Bird Area by Supporting Legislation to Modernize Mining Laws

SUMMARY

The Patagonia Mountains are a beautiful “sky island” mountain range located just north of the U.S.-Mexico border in southeast Arizona, just outside of the small town of Patagonia. The majority of this mountain range is publicly owned land, managed in trust by the Coronado National Forest. The Patagonia Mountains harbor impressive endemic biological diversity – and are a birding hotspot that is a major economic draw to the area. Both the ecology and economy of the area are threatened by a number of large-scale mineral mining proposals from foreign-owned companies. Efforts to stop these disastrous proposals from becoming a reality are hampered by the antiquated Mining Act of 1872. Legislative attempts to reform and modernize this law have been obstructed by powerful pro-mining lobbies. New legislation has been introduced that would better address the environmental and societal impacts caused by modern mining operations.

BACKGROUND

The Patagonia Mountains were recently designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the Arizona Important Bird Area Program. The Patagonias provide habitat for Madrean Occidental “Sky Island” breeding and resident birds, as well as acting as an important stop over point for migrants. From May 2009 to October 2013, the IBA survey teams found 115 species of birds in the Patagonia Mountains. Of those, 18 are special conservation status species found in significant numbers, and 12 other species of conservation status were found here in smaller numbers. Key species of interest include: Elegant Trogons, Eastern “Azure” Bluebirds, Montezuma Quail, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Arizona Woodpecker, Gray Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon and Mexican Spotted Owl.

The Patagonia Mountains are speckled with evidence of historical, small scale mining – a legacy that still negatively impacts the area’s water quality. Wildlife habitat, water quality and the tourist-based economy of the town of Patagonia are now threatened by multiple mining proposals:

- Regal Resources Inc. is a junior mining company based in Vancouver, Canada. Their Patagonia / Sunnyside exploratory project consists of 295 claims on public Coronado National Forest land, totaling approximately 5,900 acres in the Humboldt Canyon area, which has a designated Protected Activity Center for the threatened Mexican Spotted Owl.
- Wildcat Silver is a junior mining company based in Vancouver, Canada that operates in Arizona under their subsidiary Arizona Minerals, Inc. Their Hermosa property consists of 154 private acres, with additional mining claims on 13,500 acres of public land on the Coronado National Forest bordering this property. Wildcat Silver proposes to build an open pit mine to extract silver and manganese. Wildcat’s board and management team share many members with Augusta Resources, original proponent of the controversial proposed Rosemont Mine.
- Oresome Resources Pty Ltd, which is managed locally by the American company MinQuest, is an Australian-based company that is leasing the CH mining project. The CH mining project is an exploratory project for copper and gold. The CH mining project has roughly 1,000 acres of mining claims located on public land in the Coronado National Forest.
- Bullrun Investments is a minerals exploration company based out of Vancouver, BC, locally operated under the company Sulfate Resources, LLC. Bullrun owns 222 lode mineral claims involving 5,680 acres on the Coronado National Forest, encompassing parts of Kunde Mountain, Saddle Mountain, Red Mountain, the head of Meadow Valley and the Arizona Trail. Their Javelina Minerals Exploratory Drilling Project Proposal targets potash and copper.

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All of these proposed mining projects are within ten miles of the town of Patagonia, and are located in and around the origins of the community's drinking water. The health and economic prosperity of the community of Patagonia is tied deeply to the well-being of the Patagonia Mountains and the Sonoita Creek watershed, as they are the source of the town's drinking water, clean air and the centerpiece for the tourism that drives the local economy. In 2008, visitor spending in Santa Cruz County, Arizona amounted to \$257 million and accounted for over 2,000 jobs. Government revenue generated by travel spending was \$13.4 million.¹ The construction of these major mining operations not only threaten to mar the beauty of the area and cause water, air and noise pollution, but they also threaten to scare away nature-bound tourists from the area and the money they leave behind in the local business community.

The 1872 Mining Act has not been amended at all since it was first enacted by president Ulysses S. Grant 142 years ago. This antiquated law gives public minerals and land away for next to nothing, and to this day does not include any environmental provisions. Because Congress has failed to modernize this law to address the environmental and human health and safety concerns associated with mining, it has left a tragic legacy of multi-billion dollar cleanups, poisoned water, poisoned communities, and hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines.²

TAKE ACTION!

- Tell the Coronado National Forest that a full Environmental Impact Statement is necessary for Wildcat Silver's proposed Hermosa mineral drilling exploration. Sign the petition here: <http://therainforestsites.greatergood.com/clickToGive/trs/petition/SavePatagoniaMountains#KVobzQuFG2q8aCsz.99>
- Tell your congressional representative to support the Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act of 2014, H.R. 5060, to reform antiquated laws that govern mining in the United States: <http://www.patagoniaalliance.org/support-hr-5060-hardrock-mining-and-reclamation-act-of-2014/>

Introduced by Representative DeFazio [D-OR-4], H.R. 5060 would:

- Charge a royalty on minerals extracted from public lands
 - Allow mining to be balanced with other uses of public lands
 - Protect drinking water by prohibiting mines requiring perpetual water pollution treatment
 - Create 10,000 jobs by funding the cleanup of hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines
- Tell your congressional representative to support the Southern Arizona Public Lands Protection Act of 2013, HR 1183. Introduced by Rep. Grijalva {D-AZ-3}, H.R. 1183 would withdraw certain federal lands located in Pima and Santa Cruz Counties from mining and mineral leasing laws of the United States: <http://www.patagoniaalliance.org/support-southern-arizona-public-lands-protection/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Patagonia Area Resource Alliance: <http://www.patagoniaalliance.org/>

Academic Community Opinion: <http://www.patagoniaalliance.org/academic-community-opinion-on-mining/>

Earthworks: http://www.earthworksaction.org/reform_governments/mining_reform

Govtrack.us: H.R. 5060 text: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr5060/text>

H.R. 1183 text: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr1183/text>

¹ Arizona Travel Impacts, Dean Runyan Associates, Arizona Office of Tourism.

² Earthworks. Mining Reform: http://www.earthworksaction.org/reform_governments/mining_reform