



Hardrock Mining on Federal Lands

Committee on Hardrock Mining on Federal Lands, Board on Earth Sciences and Resources, Environment and Resources Commission on Geosciences, Division on Earth and Life Studies, National Research Council

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This book, the result of a congressionally mandated study, examines the adequacy of the regulatory framework for mining of hardrock minerals--such as gold, silver, copper, and uranium--on over 350 million acres of federal lands in the western United States. These lands are managed by two agencies--the Bureau of Land Management in the Department of the Interior, and the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture.

The committee concludes that the complex network of state and federal laws that regulate hardrock mining on federal lands is generally effective in providing environmental protection, but improvements are needed in the way the laws are implemented and some regulatory gaps need to be addressed. The book makes specific recommendations for improvement, including:

- The development of an enhanced information management system and a more efficient process to review new mining proposals and issue permits.
- Changes to regulations that would require all mining operations, other than "casual use" activities that negligibly disturb the environment, to provide financial assurances for eventual site cleanup.
- Changes to regulations that would require all mining and milling operations (other than casual use) to submit operating plans in advance.

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