



*Fact Sheet*

**Abandoned Mineral Land Program**

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Abandoned mines are in more than 140 of the 368 National Park System units<sup>1</sup>. An ongoing inventory in the units so far revealed more than 2400 sites with about 10,000 mine openings, piles of tailings, and hazardous structures and thousands of hectares of scarred lands. Many more abandoned mines are located in the recently acquired 1.2 million ha (3 million acres) of parkland in the California desert.

**Goals and Accomplishments of the Abandoned Mineral Land Program**

In 1983, the National Park Service established its Abandoned Mineral Land Program. The goals of the program are an inventory of all abandoned mineral land sites in the National Park Service, the elimination of public safety hazards in such sites, the elimination or reduction of adverse effects from such sites on resources in the parks, education and awareness of the public from the preservation and interpretation of historic and cultural artifacts, and the maintenance of specific abandoned mineral lands for critical wildlife habitat, particularly for threatened and endangered species.

Since its implementation, the program has become the leader in the field. Without special funding, the program:

- completed a servicewide inventory of abandoned mines and set priorities for mitigation
- restored 85 abandoned mineral land sites, closed 766 abandoned mine

<sup>1</sup>National parks and other entities of the National Park Service such as national monuments, national rivers, wild and scenic riverways, national scenic trails, and others are called *units* and collectively constitute the *National Park System*.

openings, and plugged 34 orphaned oil and gas wells at a cost of about \$7.5 million

- entered cooperative agreements with eight states and memoranda of understanding with two federal agencies to conduct environmental characterizations of sites<sup>2</sup> and reclamations in parks and to direct \$7.5 million toward reclamation on the ground
- published a brochure on abandoned mineral lands, *Abandoned Mineral Lands in the National Parks*, and a handbook, *Abandoned Mineral Land*, and designed several signs about the dangers from abandoned mineral lands.

**Position of the National Park Service**

The reclamation of abandoned mineral lands is an expensive and important land management issue. Like other federal and state land-managing agencies, the National Park Service is committing resources to a comprehensive nationwide inventory of abandoned mineral lands. Furthermore, the service supports the reform of mining laws, takes a leading role in drafting the general permit (under the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) for storm water runoff in abandoned mineral

<sup>2</sup>Specialists on the ground document, for example, the layout of a site, the type of structures, mine openings, and the sizes and locations of waste rock and mill tailing; make maps of underground mine workings; collect water, soil, and rock samples for chemical analysis; evaluate the suitability of a site for wildlife habitat; and determine the historical or cultural significance of a site.

sites, and works with the Department of the Interior to generate budget initiatives.

**Current Budget**

In 1996, 34 abandoned mineral lands were reclaimed in National Park System units at a direct cost of \$225 000. The funds were derived from a variety of sources including the National Park Service, other federal agencies, states, and private organizations. The reclamations required research, inventories, site characterizations, removal of hazardous material, mitigation, and protection of wildlife habitat and historic sites. The focus has been on above-ground sites and remediation.

However, long-term restoration will require an estimated \$165 million and short-term, immediate restoration, an estimated \$40 million. Because the Abandoned Mineral Land Program is not funded, the monies for restorations have been provided by other governmental and private agencies. The priorities of these agencies are not identical to those of the National Park Service, and therefore some important restorations were not made and the quality of some restorations was less than optimal. Lack of funds has precluded the involvement of experienced staff in the reclamations. For the most urgent restorations, the National Park Service asked for an increase in budget allocations of \$1 million/year beginning in 1998.

**For further information contact:**

David L. Steensen  
Geologic Resources Division  
National Park Service  
P. O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287  
e-mail: dave\_steensen@nps.gov