

NAEC MINING POLICY

April 1999

GENERAL STATEMENT

While mining produces minerals important to our society, people and wildlife have the right to clean water and a healthful environment. Minerals should be used efficiently. Recycling and reuse should be maximized, and extraction of virgin materials minimized. Mineral extraction and processing should be done in an environmentally responsible manner. Mining companies have a responsibility to pay for environmental costs during and after mining. The public should be adequately compensated for minerals removed from public land. In turn, individuals must use consumer goods responsibly in order to preserve natural resources.

I. RIGHT TO SAY NO

The public and government agencies should have the right to say no to inappropriate mines. Factors that may make sites unsuitable for mining include wilderness qualities, risks to water quality and quantity, unstable geology, loss of or damage to riparian areas, and proximity to other public land uses. Benefits of a mine, such as industry profits and local jobs, must be weighed against the environmental and social costs, including the cumulative effects of opening new areas to development and long-term impacts.

II. MINING AND THE BURDEN OF PROOF

The burden of proof should be on mining companies to demonstrate that specific mining practices will not degrade water quality, wildlife habitat or a disproportionate share of wilderness qualities of undeveloped areas. Resource management agencies should have the authority, funding and mandate to evaluate environmental impacts, regulate mining activities, and enforce permit stipulations and mining regulations.

III. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



Mining companies should demonstrate financial responsibility by guaranteeing funding through substantial cash bonds for monitoring, compliance with environmentally-acceptable operating standards, and reclamation.

I. PUBLIC COMPENSATION

The public should be compensated for minerals removed from public land. Royalties should be structured to bring real returns to the public and provide compensation for environmental degradation that cannot be avoided.

II. NEED FOR BASELINE DATA

Collection of baseline data should begin sufficiently in advance of mining. Data that should be collected include climate, water chemistry, hydrology, aquatic life, and wildlife habitat values.

III. MINING STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

Mining standards must protect water quality and quantity, treat waste (toxic and otherwise), and protect wildlife, habitat, and human values to the greatest extent practicable. The best available environmental technologies should be used. Resource management agencies should have the mandate and adequate funding to enforce mining standards and practices.

IV. MONITORING

A monitoring plan, including that which is to be continued after a mine closes, should be determined before a mine opens by the permitting agency and agreed to by the mining company with input from the public. Monitoring is critically important. Ongoing monitoring, including air quality, surface water quality, leak detection monitoring, and groundwater wells, is necessary to understand current conditions and to identify immediate problems. Monitoring should also identify issues that may arise 20 or 30 years into the future. After closure, a monitoring program should continue to be required, including surface and groundwater testing, and an action plan to combat acid mine drainage or toxic leakage should be developed.

V. RECLAMATION



A reclamation plan should be filed before mining begins and should be updated regularly based on current information from research, development of new deposits, monitoring, management experience, and public comment. This includes exploratory mining, regardless of whether or not a producing mine is established. Cleanup should include returning land to near original contours, restoring drainage patterns and native vegetation, and preventing acid mine drainage. When land cannot be returned to its original condition, impacts must be mitigated. The public should have the opportunity to use public land for recreation when mining operations cease.

VI. QUALITY OF LIFE

Effects such as noise, dust, hiring practices, recreational trail closures, and an influx of workers from outside the area are all important to consider when planning mines. The public should be informed of these effects and be involved throughout the planning process.

VII. PROTECTION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

Mining should not override the protection of important cultural and religious resources. Any mine plan should demonstrate how these resources will be protected, to the satisfaction of the impacted community.

