

Briefing Statement

Date: October 6, 2005

Title: Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Initiative

Issue: AML sites pose certain definite public hazards. Opportunities exist for DMG to form partnerships to abate AML hazards.

Background

Public and private lands in the California Desert have an extensive Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) management problem. Open shafts are dangerous to visitors, wildlife, and agency staff. Some abandoned mill sites contain toxic and reactive tailings that are hazardous to humans, animals, plants, and groundwater. Conversely, some sites provide habitat for federal listed threatened and endangered (T & E) species, and others contain significant historic and cultural resources.

No individual public entity within the California Desert has the staffing, technical expertise, or funding to fully manage their AML problems alone. Within much of the California Desert, abandoned mine lands go largely unmanaged. The result is that a large number of sites with dangerous open mine shafts and sites with hazardous chemicals and decaying explosives, and while impacts to cultural resources, wildlife habitat, and water resources go unmanaged.

Failure to take action regarding AML remediation could result in injury or death to agency staff and visitors, contamination of water sources, degradation of historic structures or features, Wilderness Act conflicts, and harm to both listed and terrestrial wildlife species. Injuries and deaths that result from AML accidents often could have been avoided adequate AML abatement and mitigation. Additionally, AML accidents place a high burden on already taxed rural emergency services.

Consistency with the DMG Vision/Mission

Because of the difficulty in mustering resources to address AML issues, a collaborative approach is the most effective and efficient means to manage, identify, assess, and abate AML hazards within the California Desert. A coordinated approach ensures fluid exchange of information and formation of partnerships.

Recent county involvement in the DMG provides the opportunity to involve county governments in the prioritization, planning, and partnering needed to abate AML hazards. Abatement of priority AML hazards could be an overall cost savings to agencies and county due to a decrease in the calls for emergency service and liability.

Goal and Objectives

1. Make high priority hazardous AML sites safe by reducing and removing physical and chemical hazards associated with the site.
2. Protect listed species habitat.

3. Protect historic and cultural significant mine sites and features.
4. Reclaim abandoned mine sites where appropriate.
5. Combine existing inventories of AML sites.
6. Form partnerships to accomplish initiative goals.

Task Description

Coordination Agencies will coordinate their efforts to identify, inventory, assess, and abate AML hazards through the HMWG AML sub-Committee (AMLC). The AMLC will share information, provide technology transfer, and provide a mechanism of sharing expertise and resources.

Identification and prioritization Agencies will use existing AML inventories and prioritize sites that pose the greatest threats to health and safety. Prioritization will include variables such as type of hazard (e.g. deep mine shaft that is unstable) and the degree of the threat (e.g. proximity to schools, active trails, etc.). A long-term goal of the project is to merge the existing AML inventories into one GIS coverage.

Partnering The AMLC will identify potential partners, stakeholders, and additional, alternative funding sources for AML hazard abatement. Partnerships will be sought with the industry, stakeholders, and the California Department of Conservation to fund the abatement of the highest priority AML hazards. Press releases will accompany AML hazard abatement to better inform the public about AML hazards.

Partnerships will then be sought to abate these highest priorities.

Contacts

Don Maben	Kern County Board of Supervisors	661-868-3660
Russell Scofield	DMG Restoration Coordinator	760-365-0955
John Key	BLM-CASO Hazmat Lead	916-978-4384