



DUE DILIGENCE

A project to identify best practices for public acquisition of mine-scarred lands



In California's Gold Country, public funds have been used to acquire mining-impacted lands for conservation and recreation without recognizing the physical and chemical hazards associated with the land's historical use.

BACKGROUND

The Sierra Nevada is riddled with abandoned mines and mine impacted lands that need to be assessed for chemical and physical hazards in advance of changes in ownership. Over the last several years The Sierra Fund's (TSF) Due Diligence on Mine-Scarred Lands Project has worked to establish protocols for appropriate due diligence prior to acquiring mine-scarred lands using public funds.

PROJECT

TSF has worked with property owners, cultural anthropologists, scientists from the United States EPA, local tribal leaders and environmental engineering firms to evaluate Champion and Providence Mine sites in the Deer Creek watershed. A cultural assessment was conducted to uncover historical artifacts, including those from early mining operations and from the pre-mining era when the original people lived on the land. Historical documentation of where mining features were located was then used to inform judgmental sampling to assess levels of heavy metals commonly associated with hard rock mining operations.

IMPACT

TSF's assessment protocols outline best practices for mine-scarred lands that limit landowner liability and protect public health and safety. Key findings include: (1) property appraisal should be informed by the assessment, as the discovery of physical or chemical hazards associated with abandoned mines will impact market value; and (2) The purchase agreement should minimize the liability of the new owner for existing toxic materials on the site.



NEXT STEPS

TSF continues to raise awareness about the importance of due diligence assessment in the gold country and to inform key state and local decision makers. The goal is to educate government agencies that fund land acquisition projects, inform agencies seeking funding for acquisition projects, minimize the liability of agencies purchasing land for conservation, restore habitat, and promote safe recreation for the public accessing these lands post-acquisition.

BY THE NUMBERS

TSF has developed a **7 STEP ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL** to guide the acquisition of mine-scarred lands in California, where an estimated **47,000 ABANDONED MINE FEATURES** riddle the landscape.



Source: California Department of Conservation

To ensure that public funds are utilized responsibly in the purchase of mining-impacted lands, appropriate due diligence processes must be established that limit landowner liability post-acquisition.

PROJECT FUNDERS

Past and present project funders include: California Natural Resources Agency

