



# DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

*Managing California's Working Lands*

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## CALIF. OFFICE OF MINE RECLAMATION COMPLETES INVENTORY OF ABANDONED MINES ON U.S. PARKS LAND

SACRAMENTO – The state's Office of Mine Reclamation (OMR) has completed a 3½-year inventory of potentially dangerous abandoned mines on the National Park Service's California land.

“With the detailed information and remediation advice we've been given, we can now prioritize our future efforts to better protect the safety of our visitors,” said Linda Slater, chief of interpretation for the Mojave National Preserve. “This is an excellent example of interagency cooperation in the public interest. Our desert parks are wonderful places for recreation and exploration, but many old mines pose hazards that need to be addressed.”

Using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding, the Park Service contracted with OMR's Abandoned Mines Land Unit (AMLU) in 2009 for the \$2.1 million effort. AMLU first provided technical assistance for about 500 abandoned mine closures in Death Valley National Park and Mojave National Preserve. It then inventoried more than 1,000 mine sites and 25,000 structures and equipment related to historic mining – typically called features – throughout 13 different park units. Most of the inventory work took place in the two aforementioned locales plus Joshua Tree National Park.

AMLU provided recommendations about how best to close each of the underground workings it inventoried – metal bat gates and wire netting are common methods on National Park Service lands -- along with a rough cost estimate.

“These abandoned mine sites are the legacy of times when the mining industry was less environmentally conscious – back to the Gold Rush -- and the responsible individuals or companies are long gone,” said Mark Nechodom, director of the California Department of Conservation, which includes OMR. “We recognize mining's contribution to California's history and endeavor to preserve sites of cultural and historic importance. But there are a variety of physical hazards that pose dangers to the unwary.”

Last fall, AMLU also completed an ARRA-funded project for the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), inventorying and remediating physical hazards in popular off-highway vehicle recreation areas. The BLM arrangement called for the mitigation of 150 hazardous mine features. BLM got much more for its \$1.5 million than expected; AMLU remediated 323 features and inventoried an additional 387.

“I’m very proud of our staff,” AMLU manager Glenda Marsh said. “The team inventoried the mine features under a variety of outdoor conditions, including high altitude, extreme wind, heat and cold, and typically in rough terrain. They often hiked considerable distances carrying food, water and gear, and camped onsite. Along with data-gathering in the field, the team was also busy researching historical literature on mine sites so that informed decisions could be made on how to balance the public safety hazards of a mine with its cultural or wildlife significance.”

An OMR report released in 2000 estimated that there are 47,000 abandoned mines in California. Many pre-date any regulatory or reporting authority, or even statehood itself. There is no comprehensive database that gives the precise location of most of these mines or their underground workings. Each mine may have multiple man-made “features,” such as shafts, tunnels, machinery, facilities or tailing piles that can present either a physical or environmental hazard.

AMLU has concentrated its efforts on the physical hazards associated with abandoned mines and features. Since 1997, AMLU has conducted field inventories of more than 54,500 mine features on more than 4,100 abandoned mine sites on public and private lands in California. Sites known to have drawn curious members of the public or those that are located close to homes, roadways, or recreational areas are given top priority for remediation.

“In any given year, there are typically a handful of injuries or even fatalities involving abandoned mines,” Marsh added. “More and more people seem to be visiting areas where mining occurred in the past. So it’s important for us to accurately locate abandoned mines, provide a preliminary assessment of any health and safety hazards observed, and work with other agencies to remediate the most dangerous sites we find. It’s equally important for the public to understand that visiting these sites can be dangerous.”

When it comes to abandoned mines, OMR’s motto is “Stay Out, Stay Alive.” Anyone who encounters an abandoned mine site is asked to call 1-877-OLD-MINE so the site can be investigated.

In addition to ensuring the reclamation of land used for mining, the California Department of Conservation studies and maps earthquakes and other geologic phenomena; regulates oil, gas and geothermal wells; maps and classifies areas containing mineral deposits; and administers agricultural and open-space land conservation programs. For more information, visit [www.conservation.ca.gov](http://www.conservation.ca.gov).

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