

Abandoned Mines in California

Did you know that California's mining history, before the Legislature passed [mine permitting and reclamation legislation in 1975](#), left California with **tens of thousands** of abandoned mines, many dating back to the Gold Rush? If you have traveled in California, you have likely passed within a few miles of one or more legacy mines, which are present in all 58 counties on federal lands (~ 64% statewide), privately owned lands (~ 32%), and lands owned or managed by state agencies and local governments (~ 4%).

Abandoned mines are a threat to public health and safety. Almost every year people, pets, livestock, or wildlife are [killed or injured in accidents at abandoned mine sites](#). Some mines are sources of mercury, arsenic, acid rock drainage, increased sediment, or other pollutants that contaminate watersheds and degrade water and air quality.



An abandoned mine in Southern California. Photo: DOC

About the Abandoned Mine Lands Unit

The primary focus of the [Division of Mine Reclamation](#) (DMR), within the [California Department of Conservation](#) (DOC), is on existing mining operations and the return of those mined lands to a usable and safe condition. DMR's [Abandoned Mine Lands Unit](#) (AMLU) addresses public health and safety at abandoned legacy mine sites.

- * The AMLU is a team of engineering geologists, environmental scientists, and GIS professionals that was created in 1997 to identify and address the safety and contamination hazards associated with legacy abandoned mines.
- * The AMLU partners with [multiple state, federal, and local agencies and nongovernmental organizations](#), and has made thousands of hazardous shafts and adits (vertical and horizontal openings) on public lands safer for residents and recreationists. Mine closures typically target hazardous sites near homes and high visitation areas such as campgrounds, trails, and Off Highway Vehicle parks. Sources of funding to remediate abandoned mines include state fees collected on gold and silver mined in California, federal funds, and other special funds.
- * [AMLU projects](#) include fences, backfills, polyurethane foam (PUF) closures, and a variety of gates and other structures that allow access for bats and other wildlife that use abandoned mines for habitat or shelter while keeping humans safely out. These protections, which are often built by small businesses under contract to the AMLU, bolster local economies that benefit from safe public recreation areas and help to maintain the natural pest control services that bats provide to California's working lands.
- * In an emergency involving an abandoned mine, call **911** or the local sheriff's office. To report an abandoned mine, call the AMLU's toll-free hotline — **1-877-OLD-MINE (1-877-653-6463)** — and **Stay Out – Stay Alive**.



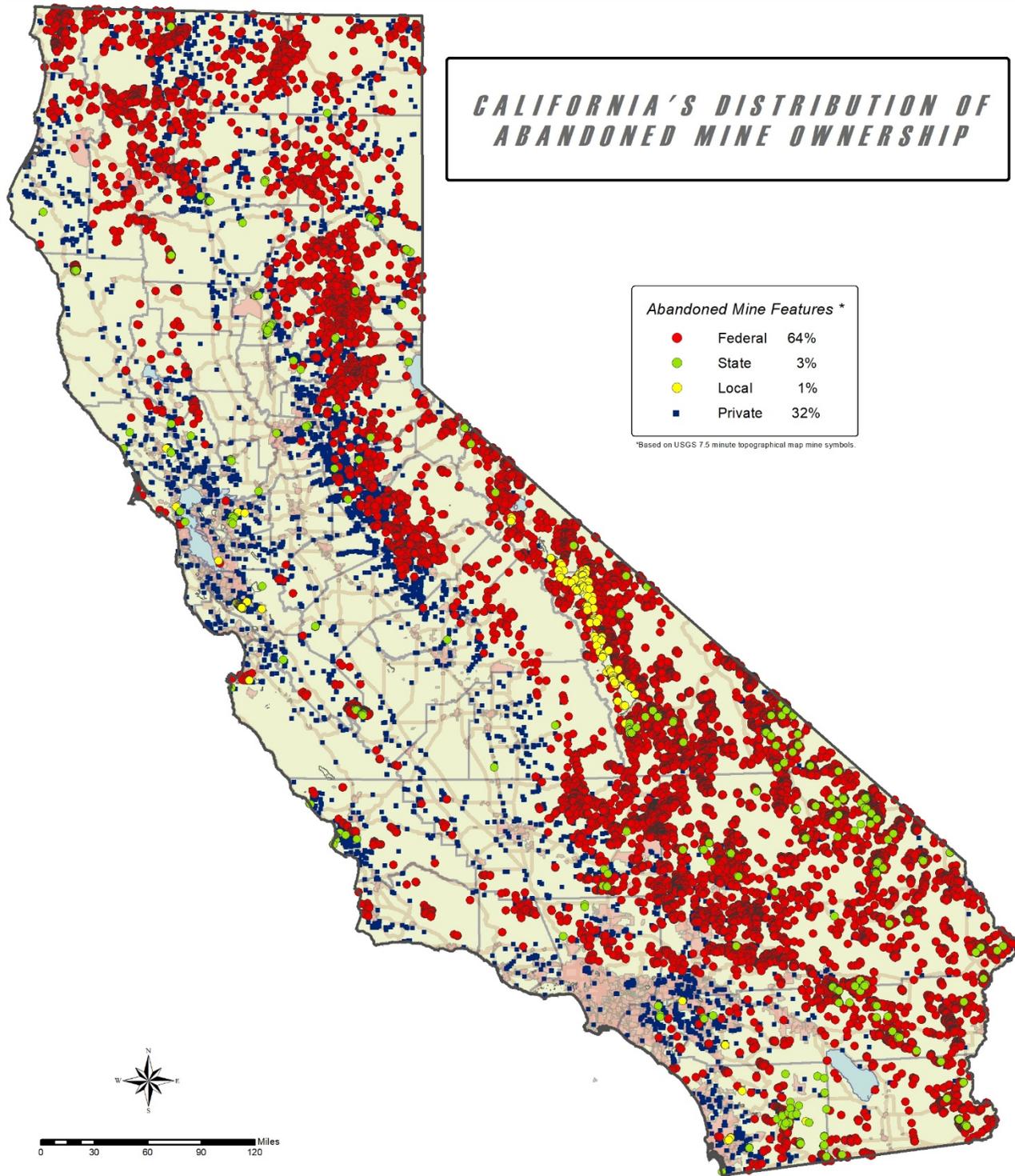


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CALIFORNIA'S DISTRIBUTION OF ABANDONED MINE OWNERSHIP



Map produced by the Department of Conservation Abandoned Mine Lands Unit, 2020