

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

June 23, 2025

Rep. Roger Williams
Chair, Committee on Small Business
2336 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Nydia Velázquez
Ranking Member, Committee on Small Business
2302 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: June 24 Full Committee Hearing on America's Mineral Future.

Chair Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, we write to provide our perspectives on critical minerals and hardrock mining ahead of June 24th's hearing on America's mineral future. Our community recognizes the need to increase domestic mining for critical minerals to support a clean energy economy; however, significant reforms to America's mining laws are needed to ensure that new mining occurs in a manner that sustains the numerous small businesses across the country that rely on safe access to healthy public lands and waters. To achieve this balance, we recommend advancing comprehensive hardrock mining reform in line with the Mining Waste, Fraud, and Abuse Prevention Act (S. 859).

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Outdoor recreation pursuits are deeply meaningful in the lives of Americans for a wide range of personal reasons. They also support nearly \$1.2 trillion in gross



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economic output, 2.3 percent of GDP, and nearly 5 million American jobs—many at small businesses—according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.¹ Beyond those numbers, outdoor recreation amenities and access to public lands and waters play a huge role in attracting a wide array of businesses and workers to rural communities across a range of industries and support vibrant and diversified local economies.

The outdoor recreation community and the outdoor economy are profoundly affected by hardrock mining. Improperly sited mines have the potential to irreversibly degrade outdoor recreation resources like rivers, trails, and climbing areas, as well as important cultural sites and conservation lands—often areas that our community considers irreplaceable. Recreationists are also affected by legacy mining pollution, which the EPA estimates has polluted 40% of headwaters in western U.S. watersheds.² At least 140,000 abandoned hardrock mine features exist across federal public lands, many of which pose physical hazards to people, as well as environmental hazards that threaten public health, wildlife, and aquatic ecosystems.³

The lack of protections for recreation and other public lands values in the 1872 Mining Law—the outdated law that still governs hardrock mining on western public lands today—poses a major barrier for our community to support mining projects that might be needed for clean energy and other purposes, leading to controversy, uncertainty, and delay around mining projects. As a result, outdoor recreationists are currently engaged in multiple campaigns across the country to protect highly valued recreation landscapes from degradation through mining, including the Boundary Waters in Minnesota, Oak Flat in Arizona, and the South Fork Salmon River in Idaho.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, BEA 24-53, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2023 (2024).

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA-840-B-00-001, Liquid Assets 2000: America's Water Resources at a Turning Point (2000).

³ Abandoned Hardrock Mines: Information on Number of Mines, Expenditures, and Factors that Limit Efforts to Address Hazards. United States Government Accountability Office. March 2020. Report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-238>.



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As Congress considers how best to accelerate domestic mineral production, it is imperative that these policies be paired with significant reforms to the 1872 law that reflect modern uses of public lands, cultural values, and local economies. At a minimum, these reforms should:

- Provide clearer discretion for land managers to approve or deny mining projects based on foreseeable impacts to ecological, cultural, or recreational resources;
- Ensure adequate funding for hardrock mine remediation;
- Provide a fair return for taxpayers;
- Protect sensitive areas and cultural sites; and
- Strengthen tribal consultation.

The Mining Waste, Fraud, and Abuse Prevention Act of 2025 (S. 859) introduced in the Senate earlier this year would make a number of these reforms and would help ensure that critical mineral production does not pose unnecessary risk to outdoor recreation and tourism-related small businesses that rely on sustainable access to public lands and waters. We recommend that this bill, or similar legislation, be advanced in any legislative package aimed at boosting critical mineral production.

Thank you for considering our community's input. We look forward to working with you to support small businesses that make up America's outdoor recreation economy.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Vice President for Policy and Government Relations
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Heather Thorne, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Clinton Begley, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association



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David Page, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance

Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers

Ben Gabriel, Executive Director, American Alpine Club

Rebekah Phillips, Executive Director, the Mazamas

Madeline Bachner Lane, Chief Executive Officer, Colorado Mountain Club

Chad Nelsen, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

