



Colorado Abandoned Mines Water Quality Study

In the 2016 state of the state address, Governor Hickenlooper championed a goal to survey and sample draining abandoned mines in Colorado that potentially impact water quality. In just one year, the Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety and the Water Quality Control Division partnered to survey and collect water samples from 145 abandoned mines.

Valuable information gathered through this study will be utilized to protect water quality through the collaborative efforts of many state and federal agencies as well as local watershed protection groups.

Colorado mining history

Colorado and mining have a long history together. The Colorado gold rush in the late 1850s brought an unprecedented number of people and mining operations into the region. Most of Colorado's mineral mining activity predates the passing of current environmental regulations in the 1970s and 1980s. Before this time, many mining companies did not sufficiently restore mined areas, leaving physical hazards and environmental impacts. High levels of metals released to streams from acid mine drainage can harm fish and aquatic ecosystems. These contaminants may also impact drinking water and agricultural water sources. This problem is prevalent in Colorado.

By most accounts, there are over 23,000 abandoned mines across the state and 1,800 miles of streams impaired due to acid mine drainage related pollutants.

By the numbers

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23,000 abandoned mines
IN 
COLORADO

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ABANDONED MINES



On the web: www.colorado.gov/cdphe/wq-mining
www.erams.com/co-abandoned-mines-water-quality