

Transition Minerals and Indigenous Impacts in the US



Topline

- There is an [estimate](#) of over 500,000 abandoned mines on federal lands
- More than 600,000 Native Americans (about 15% of the Indigenous people in the West) live within approximately 6 miles of an abandoned mine ([source](#))
- Among the key transition metals, 97% of nickel, 89% of copper, 79% of lithium and 68% of cobalt reserves in the U.S. are located within 35 miles of Native American reservations ([source](#))
- The Trump administration initiated hardrock mining rules at both the Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service. Environmental and Indigenous advocacy groups [have called](#) on the Biden administration last fall to propose changes to the existing mining law and regulations that would strengthen community consent rights
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the metals mining industry is the single largest source of toxic waste in the United States, and hardrock mines have contaminated an estimated 40% of Western watersheds ([source](#))
- Recent [studies](#) show that Native Americans living near abandoned uranium mines have an increased likelihood for kidney disease and hypertension, and an increased likelihood of developing multiple chronic diseases which is linked to their proximity to the mine waste and activities
- Historically, in the 1950's and 1960's uranium mining development left Navajo Nation residents with myriad health risks due to radiation exposure through polluted water and land. Today over 500 of these mines remain unremediated across the Navajo Nation and they continue to impact residents' health
- Navajo Nation residents have high levels of uranium in their bodies, compared to 5 percent of the U.S. population as a whole. Cancer rates have also doubled in the Navajo Nation from the 1970s to the 1990s. ([source](#))

Recommended Reading

- Earthworks, [Just Minerals Report](#)
- Environmental Health Report, [Mining and Environmental Health Disparities in Native American Communities](#)
- [Declaration on Mining and the Energy Transition signed by 175 organizations](#)
- [Op-Ed: Our Ancestors' Burial Ground is no place for a mine](#) by Gary Mckinney
- Department of Interior's [Interagency Working Group on Mining Reform](#)



Other resources

News

National

- April 2022, SA, [Mining for Clean Energy Could Undermine Biden's Environmental Justice Goals](#)
- March 2022, CommonDreams, [Conservationists to Biden: 'Clean Energy Transition Cannot Be Built on Dirty Mining'](#)
- Jan 2022, High Country News, [The dizzying scope of abandoned mine hazards on public lands](#)
- June 2021, MSCI, [Mining Energy-Transition Metals: National Aims, Local Conflicts](#)
- Dec 2021, NYTimes, [As Miners Chase Clean-Energy Minerals, Tribes Fear a Repeat of the Past](#)

Oak Flat, AZ

- Feb 2022, NPR, [Native Americans protest proposed copper mine in Arizona:](#)

In Arizona, members of the San Carlos Tribe and other activists from around the Southwest are beginning a 40-mile run and protest to the site of a proposed copper mine on land they consider sacred.

- Dec 2022, Gizmodo, [Over Half the World's Energy Transition Minerals Are on Indigenous Lands](#)

A new analysis finds that many materials needed for the shift to clean energy are on Indigenous lands, where mining could put vulnerable people at risk.

Thacker Pass/Peehee muh'uh, NV

- March, 2023, [Nevada lithium mine breaks ground despite Indigenous opposition](#)

Activists say the project threatens delicate ecosystems, while proponents say it is key to Biden's green energy agenda.

Resources

- 2023 Article, Natural Resources & Environment, [Indigenous Involvement in the North American Energy Transition: Key Trends and Requirements](#)
- 2022 Analysis, Nature Sustainability, [Energy transition minerals and their intersection with land-connected peoples](#)
- 2022 Factsheet, EPA, [Abandoned Uranium Mine Settlements on or near the Navajo Nation](#)
- 2022 Presentation/Discussion, UNPFII Intervention by Cultural Survival, [Impacts of Mining for Transition Minerals on Indigenous Peoples](#)
- 2022 Presentation/Webinar, Engineers and Scientists Acting Locally (ESAL), [Land Use, Critical Mineral Mining, and the Fossil Fuel Transition](#)
- 2020 Report, EPA, [TEN-YEAR PLAN: Federal Actions to Address Impacts of Uranium Contamination on the Navajo Nation](#)
- 2020 Blog, Environmental Law Institute, [An Ongoing Battle: Fighting the Impacts of Uranium Mining in Southwestern Indigenous Communities](#)
- 2017 Study, Environmental Health Report, [Mining and Environmental Health Disparities in Native American Communities](#)
- 2013, Yale Environment, [Boom in Mining Rare Earths Poses Mounting Toxic Risks](#)
- Earthworks' [mining page](#)
- [Just Minerals Report](#)
- Oxfam [Draft NGO sign on letter](#) on the House 'Energy' Package
- Center for Biological Diversity's [lithium mine tracker](#)