

September 17, 2024

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives

RE: Support for the Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act (S.2781/H.R.7779)

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jefferies:

The undersigned organizations write on behalf of millions of hunters, anglers, public land advocates, wildlife professionals, and conservationists in strong support of the *Good Samaritan Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act of 2024* (S.2781/H.R.7779).

This widely supported legislation recently passed the Senate by unanimous consent, has the support of over 60 members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, and bipartisan companion legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives. As you consider priorities for the remainder of the 118th Congress, we encourage you to seek every opportunity to enact this important legislation into law.

With tens of thousands of polluting abandoned hardrock mines sites throughout the country with no party responsible for reclamation, there is a tremendous opportunity for cleanups to restore the productivity of these sites, not only improving the health of wetlands and downstream fisheries, but also regenerating wildlife habitat on de-vegetated abandoned mine lands. State agencies and private entities who have no legal responsibility or connection to these abandoned mines – true Good Samaritans – want to help tackle some of these cleanup projects. Unfortunately, under federal law, Good Samaritans are treated as if they are polluters themselves, posing significant liability risks that prevent projects from moving forward.

Consequently, these abandoned mine sites go on polluting the environment and degrading fish and wildlife habitat with no end in sight. S.2781/H.R.7779 offers a practical solution by allowing fifteen permits to be issued by the EPA as part of a pilot program for non-labile third parties to begin cleaning up abandoned mines. The bill requires remediation projects to pose a low risk to the environment and produce improvements in environmental conditions, while also stipulating requirements for public involvement and environmental review.

If a permit is approved, qualified Good Samaritans would be provided with conditional liability relief, allowing them to carry out approved remediation activities. Importantly, the bill explicitly prohibits mining activities and liability protections would be voided in the unlikely event that a permittee caused an uncorrected worsening of water quality.

By passing S.2781/H.R.779, abandoned mine remediation experts at state agencies, conservation groups and other qualified volunteers will be able to implement abandoned mine cleanups that otherwise will not happen, creating jobs, improved fish and wildlife habitat, and clean water along the way.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Bass Anglers Sportsmen Society (B.A.S.S)
Bonefish and Tarpon Trust
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wildlife Federation
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunters Institute
Pheasants Forever
Pope & Young Club
Property and Environmental Research Center
Public Lands Foundation
Quail Forever
The Nature Conservancy
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi
Wild Sheep Foundation

CC:

The Honorable Thomas Carper, Chair, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, Ranking Member, Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
The Honorable Sam Graves, Chair, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Chair, House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Committee
The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Chair, House Natural Resources Committee
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Committee