

# Strategy for Addressing Mining Sites

National Site Assessment  
Symposium

May 7, 2003



# Purpose of Presentation

- To lay out a Strategy on Addressing Active and Abandoned Mining Sites
- Presentation to Highlight:
  - Key messages to including issues/problems associated with mining sites
  - Key Components of the Strategy



# Key Messages

- The universe of Abandoned Mine Lands (AMLs) is enormous – estimates range into the hundreds of thousands.
- Hundreds of active large-scale mine sites
- Environmental impacts from AMLs are a significant threat to water quality in many watersheds, especially in the West.
- No comprehensive federal (or state) program to address hardrock AML issues



- This draining adit contains high levels of a number of metals;
- Release of this water causing violations of Water Quality Stds.



This tailings pond will require a low permeability cap to minimize leaching of contaminants into a nearby stream.



# Blowing tailings at the Holden Mine in Washington



# Key Messages, continued

- Limited resources – far less than projected need
  - Superfund often called upon – but funds are dwindling
  - Not always the appropriate vehicle
- CERCLA is a very effective tool for leveraging cleanup at AML sites.
- EPA Regions are working with parties/ organizations with a vested interest to find tools for addressing AML sites; however, coordination at the HQ level needs to be formalized



# Key Messages, continued

- EPA has been operating in a reactive mode and must take steps to limit the environmental liabilities related to AML sites.
- The best immediate way to reduce CERCLA liabilities at mine sites is to aggressively improve reclamation and closure bonding at state and federal level.
- Need for Strategy that approaches Mining sites from “Prevention to Cure”



# Current Approaches

- EPA and other stakeholders are exploring options for addressing AML sites ranging from creative approaches within the NPL to other authorities

## Approach:

- **Superfund NPL**
- **NPL-equivalent**
- **Superfund Removal Authority**
- **Uranium Mill Tailings Act**
- **BLM or USFS Removals**
- **Requested AOCs**
- **CWA/NPDES**
- **CWA/Good Samaritan**
- **State VCPs**
- **Prospective Purchaser Agreement**
- **Corps of Engineers RAMs**
- **State AML program**
- **Comfort Letters**
- **Organizations – e.g., Historic Preservation Society**

# Key Components of Strategy

## Prevention of Future AMLs:

Problem: Hundreds of Active Mining/Mineral Processing Sites

- Develop Guidance on adequate financial assurance at mine sites and a “Catalog” of Financial Assurance Options.
- Guidance on proper design and operation of tailings ponds, heap leach and waste rock piles.
- Engineering Bulletins on Cost Effective and innovative Mining Technologies
- Timely review and comments on draft and final Environmental Impact Statements (EISs)



# Key Components of Strategy

## Assigning Liability to Responsible Parties:

Issue: Limited Budget - Need other funding sources

- Early-on searches for Responsible Parties
- Provide Alternative Dispute Resolution to encourage cleanup outside NPL under Superfund Alternative site approach
- Identify other funding opportunities under Clean Water Act, Brownfields or other Federal programs.



# Key Components of Strategy

## Addressing Sites through Partnerships:

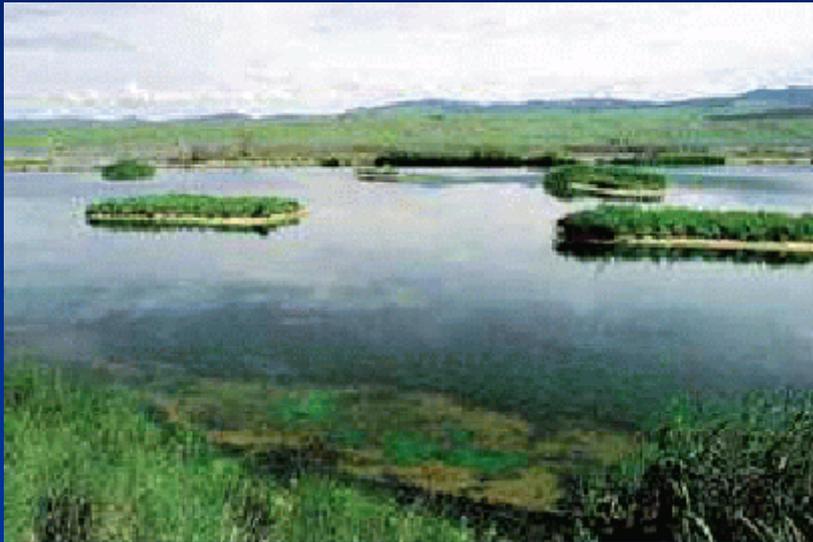
Issue: Need creative funding approaches

- Develop “Good Ideas” or “Best Practices” Guide on Partnering Opportunities
- Establish Multi-Program, Multi-Agency Panel to recommend most appropriate response programs/authorities



# Key Components of Strategy

## Superfund Site Redevelopment



Silver Bow Creek, MT –  
Restored Wetlands



Anaconda Smelter Site, MT  
Jack Nicklaus designed  
Golf Course

# Key Components of Strategy

## Non-Superfund Site



Somerset, PA. Wind Farm:  
(Former AML Site)

# Key Components of Strategy

## Addressing AML Sites through Superfund:

Challenge: Need to use Superfund in a streamlined manner

- Streamline Site Assessment program to identify highest risk sites and “carving out” portions of sites.
- Establish Mining Panel to screen NPL Sites
- Address more sites under Emergency Response
- Promote Redevelopment and Re-Mining Activities



# Key Components of Strategy

## Public Participation:

- Public Participation is Key to the success of each component of the Strategy
- Evaluate current public involvement practices at Mine Sites.



# Important Thoughts!

Problem prevention is a far better way to look at protecting the environment than cleaning up after the mess is already there!

Pooling of Resources and looking for Partners will result in lesser needs for Superfund Dollars.

Getting Public involved upfront to participate in the revitalization of their community = \$uccess

