

**MANAGEMENT OF ABANDONED MINE DRAINAGE****Description**

Abandoned mines are inactive mines that have no identifiable owners or have owners with very limited resources. State Water Resources Control Board staff has identified approximately 160 large abandoned mines in the State. A great many of these are discharging acidic mine drainage to the Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems. These abandoned mines discharge more copper, zinc, and cadmium to Delta waters than all other municipal, industrial, and agricultural sources combined. These discharges have caused substantial fish kills and buildup of heavy metals in river sediment. Abandoned mercury mines, while not acidic, also create substantial damage to aquatic habitat.

Drainage from abandoned mines create more damage to California's surface waters than any other type of discharge. With only a few exceptions, these abandoned mines have continued to discharge, unabated, to California's waters for many decades. There is currently no legislative or regulatory incentive to mitigate these discharges.

**Purpose**

Managing abandoned mine drainage at its source will improve the water quality of Delta inflow and reduce the load of pollutants to the Bay-Delta system. It will also improve the quality of water available to the Federal and State water projects.

An added benefit is the possibility of allowing municipal and industrial dischargers to remove pollutants from an upstream abandoned mine, where pollutants are concentrated and removal is more cost effective, rather than from their point source which may require very costly additional treatment in return for marginal improvement. Moreover, by removing pollutants at the mine source, many more miles of stream are protected.

**Constraints**

Regional Water Quality Control Boards have attempted at least partial mitigation at a number of abandoned mine sites. Recent court decisions indicate that if a State agency (or any other person) attempts mitigation, and engages in a limited cleanup effort, they may be exposed to unexpected liability under federal law, including the responsibility to meet water quality standards at the abandoned mines discharge.

Governor Wilson has just signed legislation (SB1108) which will allow remediating parties to take action to improve water quality at abandoned mines without incurring liability to fully meet State water quality standards.

Similar legislation, which would provide protection from Federal law, is stalled in the reauthorization of the Clean Water Act.

**Linkage to Other CALFED Action Categories**

Actions to manage abandoned mine drainage can be linked to improving Bay-Delta habitat and water quality for export as well as instream use.