



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Death Valley National Park
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Death Valley, California 92328
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***Scoping Notice – Mitigation of Safety Hazards at Keane Wonder Mine Environmental Assessment,
Death Valley National Park***

The National Park Service (NPS) will be preparing an environmental assessment (EA) which will analyze the environmental effects of implementing mine closure methods to mitigate visitor and staff safety hazards at Keane Wonder Mine in Death Valley National Park.

Abandoned Mine Lands (AMLs) are typically defined as any physical feature previously used for the extraction of minerals for which no responsible party can presently be identified. An inventory of mine sites within Death Valley National Park is currently in progress.

AML sites often pose severe human safety hazards, environmental contamination, and usually have disturbances to land, vegetation, and related ecosystems. Despite the existence of physical and environmental hazards, AMLs in the West represent a remnant of this region's rich history and, in consequence, have long been popular destinations for tourists. Due to their relative age, the physical condition of most historic mining structures has significantly deteriorated. Open mines and associated historic structures provide unusual attractions for increasing numbers of park visitors, despite the varying levels of physical safety hazards, ranging from minimal to life-threatening, presented by these features.

AML sites often also provide habitat for protected and/or sensitive wildlife species, such as bats and desert tortoise. Surveys are already being completed for these mine sites to determine the presence/absence of bats and other sensitive wildlife. The information gathered from these surveys will contribute to the NEPA process that will determine the appropriate safety treatments with consideration for resources protection.

The NPS's primary goal is to permanently close mine openings. Closing mine features from human access can involve permanent closure of mine features (non-reversible methods including earthen backfill, blasting to collapse mine features, constructing rock and mortar walls into mine features, and site restoration through re-contouring the landscape and planting vegetation). Because of wildlife and/or historic preservation considerations, the NPS sometimes secures openings with less permanent measures, such as long-term closure (reversible methods including "bat gate" installation and plugging mine openings with polyurethane foam with a surface layer of earthen backfill) or temporary closure (3-strand barbed wire fencing). Long-term closures require periodic monitoring and maintenance to ensure their efficacy. Temporary closures require frequent monitoring to ensure that they remain secure and effective, because they are subject to vandalism and do not always prevent deliberate intrusion.

As part of the scoping process for the EA, we are sending this notice to solicit comments on the proposed action. The scoping process will define the purpose, need, and objectives of the proposed action as well as identify the issues associated with the project.

We look forward to public participation in this process and believe that it will help ensure that all resources are adequately considered and evaluated in the EA. The EA will be available for public review and comment when completed in late 2009.

Scoping comments can be sent to:

Superintendent
ATTN: AML EA Comments
Death Valley National Park
P.O. Box 579
Death Valley, California 92328

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sarah Craighead". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Sarah Craighead
Superintendent