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## **Mining Division safeguards abandoned mines in Sierra County** *Legacy mining near Garfield left multiple hazards on public lands*

SANTA FE — The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program significantly enhanced public safety and environmental preservation in 2024 by systematically addressing the hazardous legacy of 20<sup>th</sup>-century mining operations in Sierra County.

The Red Hill Phase I Mine Safeguarding Project remediated 29 abandoned mine sites on federal lands, sealing dangerous vertical shafts, horizontal tunnels, and prospect pits that had remained untouched since mining operations halted in the 1960's.

The Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Program, housed within the Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department's (EMNRD) Mining and Minerals Division, collaborated with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Runyan Construction, Inc. of Silver City to restore and secure this historic mining district near Garfield, nestled in New Mexico's Caballo Mountains.

Scattered just south of Caballo Lake State Park, these abandoned mine features posed hazards to the public—including hikers and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts—who could have fallen into deep mine openings or been hit by rocks collapsing in or near the mines.

“Protecting the public from abandoned mine hazards is among the Mining and Minerals Division's most important jobs,” said EMNRD **Sec. Designate Melanie Kenderdine**. “This project was especially important because it enhanced the safety of an area that attracts heavy recreational use.”

The Red Hill project occurred over a three-month period at the end of 2024, on difficult mountain terrain in challenging weather conditions.

Mining was primarily conducted in the Red Hill project area, within the Caballo Mountains Mining and Rincon Mining districts, during the late 19th and 20th centuries, when Sierra County was the third largest producer of mineral wealth in New Mexico. During their heyday, mines in these districts produced fluorspar, along with copper, vanadium, lead, gold, barite, and manganese.

Beyond protecting human safety, the AML Program carefully preserved critical wildlife habitats. Bat Conservation International surveyed the sites, identifying multiple bat species that hibernate and breed in these abandoned mined.

The program's engineers designed safeguards that maintained access for wildlife while preventing human entry, ensuring both ecological preservation and public safety. "The ongoing coordination and collaboration between BLM and the New Mexico AML Program created a quality partnership that resulted in a timely efficient project closure," said **Chris Teske, BLM New Mexico State Office lead**.

Funding for this project was primarily provided by the BLM with supplemental funding from the federal Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation, and Enforcement through a fee on active coal mines. This money is used to safeguard and reclaim abandoned coal and hard-rock mines across the State of New Mexico.

"Our program funding has allowed us to simultaneously safeguard the public from the physical hazards associated with abandoned mines, protect critical habitat for wildlife, and provide jobs for fellow New Mexicans," said **AML Program Project Manager Matthew Peralta**, who oversaw project implementation and construction. "I am extremely proud to be a key part in that process and the benefits it provides to our state."

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*The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.*  
<https://www.emnrd.nm.gov>



Crews working to backfill a dangerous mine opening while protecting the historical structure in place.



Bat-compatible safeguarding structure protecting the public from entrance into a horizontal mine adit.



Safeguarding of a vertical shaft located immediately adjacent to a public access road.