Permitting Processes that Prevent Progress

U.S. MINE PERMITTING DELAYS

The U.S. government's process for securing the necessary mine permits now takes close to 10 years — one of the longest mine permitting processes in the world. By comparison, permitting processes in Australia and Canada, which have similar environmental standards and practices as the U.S., take between two and three years.

"It takes forever to get a new permit. How crazy is that?"

- U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm
March 2022, Reuters

Why should we prioritize U.S. mining?

Depending on who you're talking to, demand for minerals key to our energy future is set to explode between 500% to 1,000% - or more - by 2040. And the demand boom is not limited to lithium, cobalt, graphite and nickel. Copper demand is going to skyrocket as well. Silver. A wide range of minerals are key to our energy, infrastructure and technology future.

Consider the rapid pace of innovation – the minerals we need tomorrow may be different from those we are using today. Fortunately, the U.S. is rich in a wide range of mineral reserves – so these are all minerals that we can and should be getting from the U.S.

Do we even have these minerals here?

The U.S. is home to the minerals we need, but we're not producing nearly enough of them. We are at risk from a perilous and growing import dependence. The minerals demand wave will strain every sector of the economy and requires urgent action from government and industry. We are already far behind. Unless we get serious about reshoring these supply chains and bringing new mines and mineral processing online, we risk feeding the minerals dominance of geopolitical rivals.

We have abundant mineral resources here. What we need is policy to ensure we can produce them and build the secure, reliable supply chains we know we must have.

What should change?

While permitting proposals differ, the common recognition of a need to enact serious changes to our permitting processes immediately to keep up with new energy market demands and infrastructure goals is significant.

Any solution should consider steps that would reduce the burdensome regulatory process without compromising the environmental rigor contained in the process, including:

- Establishing timelines for each major step of the permit process.

- Allowing the lead agency to defer to and rely on baseline data, analyses and reviews performed by state agencies with jurisdiction over the proposed project to avoid duplicative reviews.

- Requiring federal agencies to conduct any consultations or reviews concurrently rather than sequentially to expedite the process.

- Encouraging agencies and project proponents to use memoranda of agreement to facilitate coordination.

- Imposing reasonable timeframes for challenges to agency permits and courts' reviews of those challenges.

Those who care about the environment should want these minerals to be sourced domestically, in accordance with the most rigorous environmental, labor and safety standards in the world.