Valle Vidal: Is This Western Paradise Worth Eleven Hours of Gas?
A Return to Stewardship Values

Change is in the air.

At the end of last year, 11,000 retail jewelers across the United States joined a diverse bi-partisan coalition of hunters and anglers, hikers and climbers, ski lodge and resort owners, county commissioners and officials from western states, property and small business owners, garden clubs and conservationists, and even human rights and development groups in an effort to prevent a last-minute Congressional proposal to sell off as much as 270 million acres of public lands to mining companies and land developers. This coalition overcame long odds and won the day.

Here is how Matthew Runci, head of Jewelers of America, explained his support for the campaign to “Keep Public Lands Public” in a letter to the U.S. House of Representatives:

“Our 11,000 member stores, spread throughout the United States, firmly believe that mining reforms should include strict environmental regulations that adequately protect our nation’s watersheds, forests and wildlife.”

Just before Valentine’s Day, eight leading jewelry retailers—Tiffany & Co., Cartier, Helzberg, Zales, Signet/Kay, Piaget, Van Cleef & Arpels, and Fortunoff—made an in-principle commitment to responsible sourcing of gold and other metals. They signed up to the Golden Rules of responsible sourcing, developed by our “No Dirty Gold” campaign.

Just this month Citigroup announced the launch of a “sustainable mining” index, using a combination of environmental, social, and economic gauges to determine whether mining company practices are likely to “enhance or destroy shareholder value.”

According to The Globe and Mail, “Citigroup says a groundswell of public opinion has expanded the traditional scope of so-called sustainable development, once limited to obvious issues such as environmental pollution and human rights. Citigroup’s Sustainability Mining Index ranks many of the world’s largest mining companies based on five broad measures of sustainable development. The index factors in not only sustainability, governance and human rights, but also exposure to commodities, country-related risk aspects and mine development… A company’s commodity exposure can encompass recycling, emissions, energy use, health, safety and environmental impacts.”

Citigroup asserts that by managing risks effectively they will “outperform their less-conscious rivals.” Sustainable practices, it says, have “the potential to add or destroy value for metals and mining companies, and thereby for investors.”

What’s next? A system for certifying that the gold jewelry comes from mines that respect communities, the environment, and human rights? Sales of jewelry marked from clean sources, and recycled sources, in stores ranging from Tiffany & Co. to Wal-Mart? A virtual mine—one that mines the metals and materials from cell phones and other electronics? A system to certify that the gas you are pumping into your car comes from a company pledged to protecting special places and seriously developing and offering alternative fuel sources? I think so.

All of these changes are fueled by a simple concept: environmental stewardship—you are responsible for what you sell, from its original source to its final destination—and that risk-avoidance (including environmental and social risk) is good business.

Some would argue that this represents a shift in values. It’s not. This is a return to age-old values of stewardship and responsibility, and protecting communities and our natural environment. What’s interesting is that the corporate sector is outpacing government in responding to these important environmental and social issues and values.
The New York Times Uncovers the Real Cost of Gold

The price of gold is higher than it’s been in 17 years. But much of the gold left to be mined is microscopic and is being wrung from the earth at enormous environmental cost, often in some of the poorest corners of the world.


“JA supports meaningful reform to the clearly outdated Mining Act of 1872. Our 11,000 member stores, spread throughout the United States, firmly believe that mining reforms should include strict environmental regulations that adequately protect our nation’s watersheds, forests and wildlife and should institute fair market value fees for mining claims on Federal lands. The mining provisions that were quietly slipped into H.R. 4241 accomplish neither of these objectives. Indeed, they would be a major step backward.”

Matt Runci, JA November 2005
As the number of oil and gas wells drilled in the West skyrockets, more facilities are being located in areas where people live. Not surprisingly, conflicts between oil and gas operators and landowners are also on the rise.

Noise is one of the most significant issues for people who live close to oil and gas operations. Noise emanates from the huge rigs that operate day and night, sometimes for weeks on end as well as from compressor facilities and heavy trucks.

As a result of inadequate noise regulations and failed negotiations with a company drilling for coalbed methane, several landowners in Las Animas County, Colorado have abandoned their homes. Their lives were so severely affected by the noise and heavy traffic that they felt they had no choice but to move—and their houses remain empty and for sale.

In 2005, complaints from citizens spurred the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) to revamp its noise rule. At hearings held in September and December, OGAP joined forces with the San Juan Citizens Alliance and citizens from affected communities to push the commission to strengthen noise rules.

At their December meeting the COGCC amended its rule governing noise from oil and gas operations, a victory for landowners across the state plagued by noise pollution!

Only two weeks after the noise rule was amended, and in a move that belied the often-heard claims of wanting to be a “good neighbor,” representatives from the oil and gas industry requested that the COGCC revoke its decision to lower the allowable residential noise level. For the time being, Colorado residents can enjoy a good night’s sleep.

You can help by calling for a Quieter Colorado—free from unnecessary drilling noise. Go to www.quietercolorado.org. Send a message to the COGCC commissioners and become an oil and gas e-activist.

For more information, visit: http://earthworksaction.org/ogapnoise.cfm

Homes Abandoned Due to Oil and Gas Noise
Gail and Al Van Staveren, and three other families from their area have abandoned their homes in Las Animas County, CO. The noise and traffic from nearby coalbed methane operations have made their homes uninhabitable.
Sources of noise:

- drilling rig (top); diesel-powered pump jack (above)

Community Case Studies:

- Ron Moss, a Wyoming landowner, describes the dreadful noise as “a jet plane circling over your house for 24 hours a day.”

- Gail Van Staveren of Las Animas County, Colorado, describes the effects of low frequency noise from coalbed methane wells in this way: “We have had over 40 days of nonstop headaches, ear pain and pressure and we are now unable to stay in our home. We have used ear plugs and slept on the floor in a desperate attempt to get away from it. You cannot put your hands over your ears and get away. It goes right through and into your skull.”

- Another Las Animas County resident says he is “awakened by gas well noise about five nights out of every week. It is like someone parked a big diesel truck outside your window and left it idling all night long.”

EARTHWORKS Blocks Corporate Land Grab

Faced with one of our biggest challenges in the past decade, EARTHWORKS, along with an unprecedented coalition of allies, defeated a Congressional proposal that would have sold off millions of acres of public lands to corporate interests. As the first session of the 109th Congress drew to a close, a number of anti-environmental provisions related to mining were attached to the House Budget Reconciliation Bill by Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA), chair of the House Resources Committee and Congressman Jim Gibbons (R-NV), chair of the Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources. EARTHWORKS and our partners immediately launched a national campaign to protect special places in the West and prevent privatization of western public lands.

Former Solicitor of the Interior John D. Leshy called the mining provisions in the Budget Reconciliation Bill, “the largest public land grab in U.S. history.” If the provisions had passed, they would have allowed land speculators and multi-national mining and energy corporations to take ownership of hundreds of millions of acres of federal public lands in the West. In the process, public lands now used by millions of Americans for hunting, fishing and myriad other recreational purposes could have been placed off limits.

EARTHWORKS mobilized hunters and anglers, climbers and hikers, community leaders, jewelers retailers, county and state officials, scientists and legal experts, taxpayer watchdog groups, and local, state and national environmental groups to oppose the proposal. Together, this diverse coalition pushed the issue into the national spotlight, generating significant local, regional and national press coverage, gaining the support of both Democratic and Republican lawmakers along the way. The coalition demanded the provisions be withdrawn, and pressed for a full, open debate on the 1872 Mining Law.

After weeks of hard work, Representative Gibbons (R-NV), the most vocal supporter of the provisions, publicly announced their withdrawal. Through this hard-fought victory, EARTHWORKS successfully promoted the protection of public lands in the West and elevated the need for real and meaningful reform of the 1872 Mining Law to an unprecedented level of attention in the media and amongst key federal decision-makers. For more information on this issue, please visit www.bettermines.org/pombo.cfm.
Valle Vidal: Is This Western Paradise Worth Eleven Hours of Gas?

By Jim O’Donnell, Outreach Coordinator, Coalition for the Valle Vidal

As a winter of painfully high energy prices draws to a close, it’s worth taking a moment to reflect on the choices that we face in places that we care deeply about, places like the Valle Vidal in northern New Mexico. Over the past five years, rising demand and prices for natural gas have combined with poor government planning and rapidly declining North American production rates to drive drilling into areas where we never imagined it was possible. The Valle Vidal in the Raton Basin is one of these.

The choice that we face in Valle Vidal is being framed by many as a choice between protecting an area of scenic beauty, a natural treasure, and drilling the area’s abundant oil and gas reserves to meet our growing energy needs. In fact we are being told that we must choose between preserving our children’s natural heritage and allowing its industrialization—all for enough gas to supply California for eleven hours. But at the Coalition for Valle Vidal we see this as a false choice. We do not have to sacrifice the Valle Vidal to solve our nation’s energy problems. We have better, wiser options that will allow us to meet our energy needs.

How is this possible? The military and other large energy consumers throughout the nation are relying more on wind power and investing more heavily in energy efficiency. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the American military is the largest purchaser of clean energy in the nation. In fact, several Air Force bases utilize wind power to meet all of their energy needs. Other bases are striving to meet that goal. In a recent interview, an officer at Ft. Carson, Colorado pointed out that “our most commonly used energy sources, coal, oil, natural gas, are limited in supply, taking thousands, even millions of years to regenerate. In contrast, renewable energy sources are created daily, offering a limitless supply.”

Developing our clean energy resources—namely, energy efficiency and renewable energy from the wind and sun—is the fastest, cheapest, most reliable way to increase energy supplies and hold down prices.

Here in New Mexico, where the wind is always blowing and the sun always shining, the alternative is obvious. By building two new wind farms like those at the New Mexico Wind Energy Center, we could eliminate the need for all of the gas beneath the Valle Vidal. Drilling in this economically vital area is a needless sacrifice when we can generate the same amount of energy with just two wind farms.

About the Author: Jim O’Donnell is the outreach coordinator for the Coalition for the Valle Vidal and lives in beautiful New Mexico. The coalition is made up of sportsmen, ranchers, outfitters and guides, local business, concerned citizens, outdoor enthusiasts and conservation groups. The broad-based nature of the Coalition reflects a diverse spectrum of interests the have united to protect the Valle Vidal from CBM development.
What’s more, if the Valle Vidal were drilled, it would take 20 to 30 years to fully develop that 11 hours’ worth of gas. But a fully functioning wind farm takes just nine to twelve months to build. Substituting two wind farms for the gas in the Valle Vidal would not only preserve the multi-million dollar recreation economy the Valle Vidal supports, but it would also create two to three times as many jobs as drilling and give many in northeast New Mexico some much-needed additional income.

The bottom line: clean energy is just as reliable as natural gas and coal-fired power, and is often less expensive. Right now, Coloradoans who get their energy from the wind are paying an average of $10 a month less than those that source from coal- and gas-fired power plants. Improving energy efficiency—more insulation, better windows, efficient lighting and appliances, and high-tech temperature controls—will also protect places like the Valle Vidal. For every dollar we invest in energy efficiency, we save $2.50 on our energy bill.

Devastating the Valle Vidal, fouling our water and polluting our air is a needless and ultimately foolish sacrifice when we could solve our nation’s energy problems by developing our vast supply of clean energy. Clean energy development is key to protecting our public lands, our waters, and the people and economies that depend on them.

**For More Information: www.vallevidal.org**

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“New Mexico’s Valle Vidal is important for many reasons, but it is not important as an energy source. The Valle Vidal, with estimated reserves of about 0.05 Tcf is less than trivial in the context of the USA’s natural gas future.”

--William M. Brown is a retired federal earth scientist who tracks and interprets energy-related scientific, economic, and political issues for the Coalition for the Valle Vidal and others.
For the first time ever, eight of the world’s top jewelry retailers have pledged to move away from “dirty” gold sales and are calling on mining corporations to ensure that gold is produced in more socially and environmentally responsible ways. The retailers—the Zale Corp., the Signet Group (the parent firm of Sterling and Kay Jewelers), Tiffany & Co., Helzberg Diamonds, Fortunoff, Cartier, Piaget, and Van Cleef & Arpels—were announced by the No Dirty Gold campaign in a full-page ad in The New York Times on February 13th, timed to coincide with Valentine’s Day, one of the biggest jewelry-buying holidays in the United States.

“Because jewelry retailers buy the majority of gold produced worldwide, they have the power to help clean up the mining industry,” said Payal Sampat, co-director of the No Dirty Gold campaign and international campaign director for EARTHWORKS. “We applaud the leadership of these companies. It’s an important first step.”

The eight retailers identified as “leaders” by the No Dirty Gold campaign have agreed to actively work within their companies and with their suppliers and vendors to track the sources of their gold. They have also committed to sourcing from operations that respect social, human rights, and environmental standards in gold production, when such independently verified sources become available. By doing so, these retailers are signaling to the mining industry that there is a demand for more responsibly produced gold from the sector that is the largest user of gold—just as tens of thousands of individual consumers have already done over the last two years. (The jewelry sector accounts for more than 80 percent of gold consumption.)

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** Helzberg Diamonds Says NO to Dirty Gold! **

“Helzberg Diamonds is committed to sourcing precious metals that are not produced at the expense of communities, workers, or the environment. Helzberg Diamonds is joining the industry’s social and environmental leaders, not only by upholding standards for the company’s own purchasing activities, but by encouraging others in the industry to ensure that the gold and metals they purchase come from sources that meet the highest human rights, social and environmental standards in all stages of the supply chain, including mining, processing, refining and recycling.”

—H. Marvin Beasley, Chairman and C.E.O. of Helzberg Diamonds
Specifically, these eight firms have made a commitment to working to source increasing percentages of their gold from mining operations that:

- Respect basic human rights
- Obtain the free, prior, informed consent of affected communities
- Respect workers’ rights and labor standards
- Do not dump mine wastes into the ocean, rivers, lakes, or streams at new mines
- Do not contribute to armed or militarized conflict
- Do not threaten protected areas or areas of high conservation or ecological value
- Do not force communities off their lands at new or expanded mines
- Do not produced uncontrolled sulfuric acid
- Provide financial guarantee for clean-up and mine closure costs

The firms also support the development of an independent, third party system to allow for the verification of the above principles.

The No Dirty Gold campaign ad also identified the following eight retail firms as “laggards:” Rolex, JCPenney, Wal-Mart, Fred Meyer Jewelers, Whitehall Jewellers, Jostens, QVC, and Sears/Kmart. Despite more than two years of outreach, these companies have remained silent on the issue of more responsible sourcing of gold. Since February 2004, the No Dirty Gold campaign has sent numerous letters to these companies sharing its concerns about the serious human rights and environmental problems associated with gold mining, and asking for commitments to more responsible sourcing. The campaign sent another letter to these firms the day the New York Times ad ran inviting them to join the leadership group by signing on to the above human rights and environmental criteria.

We would like to thank all our members and supporters who have helped us campaign for the past two years. It is because of your consumer voices that jewelers today are standing up for healthy communities, clean water, and human rights. This is an important victory in the continuing fight to reform dirty mining practices!
This past fall, EARTHWORKS took a new approach to protecting special places by launching the Citizen’s Mining Company—a mining company with a twist. The Citizen’s Mining Company was created to stake mining claims in special places throughout the West to protect these places against large-scale mining, and to illustrate the need for mining law reform.

In October, EARTHWORKS staff, local citizens, and campaign partners took to the hills to stake claims covering 1,000 acres of public land near municipal water supplies, wilderness areas and important fisheries in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada and New Mexico.

“Sometimes you need to fight fire with fire. The Citizen’s Mining Company was created to protect special places because the 1872 Mining Law doesn’t,” said Roger Featherstone of EARTHWORKS.

Below: Coloradans have claimed a one mile wide strip of the Arapaho National Forest — sandwiched between the Mount Evans Wilderness to the west and the Mount Evans State Wildlife Area to the east — the Citizen’s Mining Company hopes to protect the Wilderness, the Wildlife area, and the Bear Creek watershed from mineral development.

Mine All Mine: The Citizen’s Mining Company wants to be Yours, Partly Yours

Fees for filing and maintaining legal claims add up. You can help the Citizen’s Mining Company by adopting a claim now. Your tax-deductible $125 donation will protect 20 acres of at-risk public lands for a year!

Visit www.bettermines.org or use the enclosed envelope

Upstream from north Idaho’s famous Lake Pend Oreille (below), a mining company wants to construct the proposed Rock Creek mine adjacent to and underneath the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness Area. This wilderness area provides pure drinking water from snowmelt that feeds nearby creeks and streams, extraordinary recreational opportunities, and key habitat for threatened species such as lynx, grizzly bear, and bull trout. The proposed Rock Creek mine would be the first mine constructed in a federally designated wilderness area and would destroy the pristine nature of this area, including contaminating or draining alpine lakes and streams. (photo below)
Peruvian Mining Activist Honored for Work to Protect the Environment

Father Marco Arana of Peru was named in the November 2005 issue of Condé Nast Traveler, the prominent international travel magazine, as one of three runners-up for the magazine’s annual Environmental Award. Arana was chosen in recognition of his work to prevent mineral exploration on Cerro Quilish, a mountain at the center of the watershed for the Peruvian city of Cajamarca. EARTHWORKS has been working with Arana and his Cajamarca-based environmental organization, GRUFIDES, for many years.

When Newmont Mining proposed expanding its Yanacocha mine to Cerro Quilish in 2004, Cajamarca residents took to the streets to protest. They objected to gold mining on Quilish on the grounds that it is a sacred place for the indigenous population as well as a source of irrigation and drinking water for nearby valleys and the city of Cajamarca. Arana helped mediate discussions between protesters and Newmont, which resulted in the company agreeing not to continue exploration on Cerro Quilish. For helping to resolve this conflict, Arana won Peru’s most important national human rights award in 2004.

Congratulations Father Marco Arana!

“For the history of gold in Cajamarca is a story of injustice, a story of oppression, a story of death and of taking natural resources. In a way that history is being repeated now. Maybe what makes it different is that now Peruvians have the possibility of establishing rules... Maybe these conditions can change.”

PBS/Frontline interview with Father Marco Arana, 2005

CMC continued

Under the archaic 1872 Mining Law, any U.S. citizens or companies are allowed to stake and hold an unlimited number of mining claims on public lands. Furthermore, the law prevents federal land managers from balancing mining with other important land uses. Fuelled by record-high prices for gold, copper, and other previous metals and minerals, more than 45,500 new mining claims have been staked by mining companies in eleven western states this year alone—a fourfold increase since 2001, according to Bureau of Land Management statistics. “That's why the Citizen's Mining Company is acting now to protect these special places,” said Roger Featherstone.

EARTHWORKS intends to hold the claims until the outdated law is replaced. To that end, the formation of the Citizen’s Mining Company coincided with the introduction in Congress of a bipartisan bill championed by Congressmen Nick Rahall (D-West Virginia). The new bill would modernize the outdated 1872 Mining Law to better protect communities and America’s treasured places from the damage so often associated with large industrialized hardrock mines.

For more information on the Citizens Mining Company, contact Roger Featherstone at EARTHWORKS southwest office (520) 884-5415.
It’s Spring Cleaning Time!

Organize a local cell phone collection in your home town to support EARTHWORKS and keep toxic waste out of the environment.

We’ll supply you with all the materials you’ll need such as collection bins, posters, and press release materials. If you need any assistance developing a plan, we can help with that too.

To donate a phone or for more information on EARTHWORKS’ cell phone recycling program visit: www.recyclemycellphone.org

Contact:
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