**Protecting Colorado’s Rivers and Streams from Mining Pollution:**

**Supporting Amendments to the Colorado Mined Land Reclamation Act**

Mining has played an important role in the history and development of Colorado and continues to provide important economic development when done responsibly. But unsafe mining practices have led to the degradation of many of Colorado’s rivers and streams, and in recent decades significant disasters at mine sites have endangered the environment and placed the burden of cleanup on taxpayers. The most recent of these -- the Gold King spill of August 2015 -- turned the Animas River yellow and sent toxic mine waste hundreds of miles downstream, affecting recreation, farming and ranching, and requiring publicly funded cleanup that has, and will continue, to cost millions.

We support reforms to the Colorado Mined Land Reclamation Act (MLRA) as a well-reasoned and effective measure to help reduce the risk of mining disasters in the future and to relieve taxpayers of the burdens of paying for them. These critical reforms should:

* Prevent mines that will permanently need water treatment after closure
* Eliminate “corporate guarantees” for reclamation bonding, and instead require actual financial resources to be set aside for cleanup to protect taxpayers
* Ensure the state’s ability to require bonds that specifically cover the costs of water treatment and to protect water quality when a mine is in operation

Currently, Colorado law does not provide these safeguards. While the state mining agency works hard to protect taxpayers and our natural resources, only by reforming the MLRA can we be sure that tomorrow’s mines will be safe -- both environmentally and fiscally -- into the future.

The practice of allowing mining companies to “self-bond” using “corporate guarantees” rather than providing concrete financing to ensure cleanup is outdated and too risky to protect Coloradans. Under these reforms, mines would no longer be allowed to simply make a promise to pay for reclamation after they close, but will instead have to back up their promise with real financial resources or insurance policies to guarantee it. This leaves flexibility for the mining industry, but eliminates the possibility that irresponsible mining companies will walk away from their mines or leave taxpayers with the bill after bankruptcy.

These reforms would clarify state law to ensure that both land and water affected by mining operations will be cleaned up after closure. Currently, state law does not provide specific provisions requiring that bonds be provided for water quality restoration at mine sites. These reforms will confirm the state’s ability to require financial assurances from companies to explicitly protect water quality.

In order to limit the long-term risks to the public and the environment from mines that require water treatment in perpetuity (hundreds to thousands of years), reforms to the MLRA will require companies to design future mines to avoid permanent water quality impacts. However, if unexpected complications arise at mines in the future, the law would still allow the state to require long-term treatment and collect adequate financial guarantees -- even after mine closure -- to ensure that water quality will be protected.

We strongly support these common-sense amendments to the Colorado Mined Land Reclamation Act in order to protect the people, property and public resources of Colorado. We encourage our local and state officials to engage on this issue and make these reforms a reality.

Name:

Email:

Town or city of residence:

Zip Code:

Phone:

Do you own or represent a business or organization that you would like listed on this letter? If so, please specify below:

Business or organization name:

Place of business or organization:

Type of business or organization: