

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

STAFF SUMMARY REPORT (Lindsay Whalin)  
MEETING DATE: March 9, 2016

**ITEM:** 8

**SUBJECT:** **Mine Cleanup Program** – Status Report

**DISCUSSION:** This item describes our strategy for investigating and prioritizing the cleanup of mines. As described in our Basin Plan, there are over 50 abandoned or inoperative mines within the Region. The commodities extracted include mercury, magnesium, manganese, sulfur, coal, copper, silver, and chromium. A large percentage of the mining activities took place from 1890-1930, although some areas were mined as recently as the 1970s. The size of these mines varies from relatively small surface mines of less than half an acre to the world's second largest mercury mine, the New Almaden District, located in Santa Clara County.

Water quality problems associated with mining activities can be divided into four categories:

- Erosion and sediment discharges from surface mines and mining waste piles;
- Acid or otherwise toxic aqueous discharges;
- Erosion of soils contaminated from ore processing; and
- Discharges of waste rock with elevated metal concentrations, including mercury.

The beneficial uses of a number of our Region's water supply reservoirs, creeks, and streams have been impacted as a result of historic mining activities. Board staff began investigating the water quality impacts associated with mining in the early 1990's. Over the last 25 years, we have successfully cleaned up a number of high priority mines. However, lack of staff funding has limited our ability to assess the water quality threat posed by the remaining mines. With a portion of the new staff funding provided by SB445, we are reassessing the inventory of mines in our Region and prioritizing sites for further investigation and cleanup.

We last inventoried mines in our Region in 1998. Taking advantage of tools that were not available at that time, such as Google Earth satellite imagery and GIS layers containing information about water quality and historic mining operations, we are now more able to assess water quality threats from our desktops. We are creating a prioritized list of mines using a weighted ranking system that includes factors such as the presence of mining wastes at the ground surface, evidence of site or waste pile erosion, and proximity of wastes to surface water. The highest priority sites will be inspected and characterized. Once inspected and characterized, we will reprioritize sites for cleanup. For those sites requiring cleanup, we will move them into our Site Cleanup Program, or if there are no viable responsible parties, we will explore alternative funding mechanisms for

cleanup. We will continue to report to the Board on our progress in addressing the cleanup of mines.

**RECOMMEN-  
DATION:**

This report is presented for information purposes only – no action is needed.