

Senator James E. Risch Testimony
Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing on S.3571 – Good Samaritan
Remediation of Abandoned Hardrock Mines Act of 2022
September 29, 2022

Thank you to the Chair and Ranking Member for inviting me to speak on this important issue.

Mining has a long and rich history in my home state of Idaho – a history that is still being written today. Idaho, the aptly named Gem State, has produced world-class supplies of silver and minerals critical for defense needs from World War II to the Cold War. As we work to further advance security and clean energy capabilities and shore up supply chains, Idaho’s supplies of critical and strategic minerals will play a central role.

Today, mining companies are held to rigorous environmental and reclamation standards throughout the mining process, and are able to safely and sustainably extract important mineral resources. However, this was not always so. Many long-abandoned mines, while once a major boon to communities across the West, now pose serious environmental risk without having a party clearly responsible for them.

I am honored to partner with Senator Heinrich to lead S. 3571, the Good Samaritan Remediation of Hardrock Mines Act, along with an impressive and growing coalition of bipartisan cosponsors. This bill is a reflection of years of collaboration among interested parties – or good Samaritans – with the genuine will to clean up these abandoned mines. I have spent decades working to solve natural resource problems in the U.S. Senate and the Idaho Senate, and it is rare to have industry, conservation, and recreation groups rally around a singular uniting issue the way they have with this legislation. This type of support is a testament to how important and timely this bill is. We have good faith actors who are ready and invested in remediating these legacy sites. We owe it to them and Western communities alike to empower and encourage these actions. I appreciate the step this Committee is taking to do so by discussing this legislation, and I hope it will be the first step in its swift advancement.

Again, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak on this topic, which is critical for communities across Idaho and the rest of the West.