

## LWVOR HARD ROCK MINING POSITION STATEMENT

As proposed by the Member Agreement Committee on May 6, 2022.

Adoption of this position was ratified by the LWVOR Board on May 15, 2022.

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The League of Women Voters of Oregon recognizes society's need for key minerals, and also the potential harmful environmental, health, and human impacts that mining for these minerals can produce.

Currently there is little hard rock mining in Oregon, and much of Oregon's topography is not well-suited to mining. However, minerals such as gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, nickel, and uranium have been mined in the past, and these and new minerals such as lithium may be mined in the future in Oregon.

Hard rock mining in Oregon is governed by a complex and interconnected set of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and permitting processes, which include provisions for environmental protection, economic evaluation, and reclamation of mining sites.

The League supports an approach to the overall regulation and oversight of hard rock mining that will:

- Modify leasing and permitting decision criteria to eliminate the dominance of mineral rights over alternate public land uses, environmental protection, and of ecosystem services such as biodiversity and climate regulation.
- Improve leasing, permitting, and oversight processes to assure ample opportunities for public disclosure and stakeholder comment.
- Modernize standards for policy review to ensure adequate protection of health, safety, other industries, air, water, habitats, and ecosystem services, and require mining operations on public lands to comply with all environmental regulations.
- Establish procedures to protect specific areas of critical environmental concern, for example, by allowing states, political subdivisions, or stakeholder groups to petition to exclude mining in special areas, and/or provide for expedited review of areas that may be inappropriate for mining.

Further, the League would support reforms to federal mining laws and practices that will:

- Effectively repeal the directive in the Hard Rock Mining Law of 1872 that hard rock mining take precedence over all other uses of public lands.
- Strengthen and enforce mining financial responsibility requirements, so that they (a) compensate taxpayers for industry resource extraction on public lands, by establishing a system of permitting, leasing and royalty fees for domestic and foreign mining exploration, extraction, and revenues; and (b) establish funding mechanisms and procedures to reclaim mining sites, restore ecosystems adversely affected by mining operations, remediate environmental degradation, and provide for long-term monitoring.

Finally, the League supports changes in Oregon's laws and practices that will:

- Strengthen existing statutory provisions for mine operators' reclamation bonds or alternative security, particularly as they relate to long-term site care and monitoring needs and ensure that permits issued by the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries include the costs of department oversight and review.
- Enhance opportunities for public input concerning mining on public lands, and adopt policies that support and encourage public participation in actions that may impact the State's environmental resources and local economies.
- Promote and incentivize recycling programs that reduce consumption and support reuse and recycling of non-renewable virgin metal minerals, in order to reduce the mining and extraction of these materials and to protect and conserve other environmental and natural resources; adopt legislation that establishes metal recycling patterned after Oregon's E-Cycles Program. Among the objectives of a metal recycling program would be: (a) developing consumer information and education on the economic and environmental value of reuse and recycling of metals; (b) providing free recycling at widely dispersed collection sites throughout the State; (c) promoting state and regional processing sites for refurbishment, recovery, and reuse of metal materials; and (d) funding DEQ administration and monitoring compliance at collection and processing sites.