

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Aims to Clean Up Legacy Pollution in the Appalachian Region

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For decades, many American mining and drilling communities have had legacy mining and drilling pollution issues. Much of the pollution stems from abandoned coal mines and oil and gas wells. In West Virginia alone, there are at least 8,000 known abandoned coal mines, 4,600 orphaned wells, and nearly 10,000 wells that will need to be properly plugged.¹ These abandoned sites have been discharging toxins into local water supplies and the atmosphere. On November 5, 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (“Act”) that includes measures to counteract the pollution left behind in connection with abandoned mines and oil and gas sites.

The Act plans to make a \$1.2 trillion investment in rebuilding roads, bridges, water infrastructure, internet, and more. As part of the Act, the U.S. government will invest \$16 billion in cleaning up legacy pollution from mining and drilling activities. Some funding will come through the extension of the Abandoned Mine and Reclamation Fund program through 2034. The \$16 billion federal investment will be allocated in the following manner:

- \$11.3 Billion for Abandoned Mine Land and Water Reclamation Projects - These funds support vitally needed jobs for coal communities by funding projects that close dangerous mine shafts, reclaim unstable slopes, improve water quality by treating acid mine drainage, and restore water supplies damaged or otherwise impacted by mining.
- \$4.7 Billion for Orphaned Well Site Plugging, Remediation, and Restoration Activities - These funds will invest in an Energy Community Revitalization program for plugging orphaned oil and gas wells and restoring abandoned sites to mitigate the risk of groundwater contamination, noxious gases emissions, and harm to wildlife.²

The funding provided by the Act expanded an earlier investment of \$260 million by the Department of the Interior whereby the department issues grants from the Abandoned Mine Land and Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization programs. A substantial amount of funding will go to states in the Appalachian region, including Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is widely seen as the state requiring the most funding to clean up legacy pollution issues attributed to abandoned mine and well sites. Pennsylvania has over 34,000 abandoned coal mines and more than 8,600 orphaned wells.³ Pennsylvania will be provided \$3.8 billion over 15 years to clean up land polluted

¹ Haaland, D., 2022. *Deb Haaland: It's time to invest in WV coal communities (Opinion)*. [online] Charleston Gazette-Mail. Available at: <https://www.wvgazettemail.com/opinion/op_ed_commentaries/deb-haaland-its-time-to-invest-in-wv-coal-communities-opinion/article_9579b23e-9a92-5ea7-8ffe-36de167f504a.html> [Accessed 16 February 2022].

² Doi.gov. 2022. *Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal Will Clean Up Legacy Pollution, Protect Public Health*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/bipartisan-infrastructure-deal-will-clean-legacy-pollution-protect-public-health>> [Accessed 16 February 2022].

³ Doi.gov. 2022. *Secretary Deb Haaland, National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy Discuss Investments to Support Reclamation Jobs During Pennsylvania Visit*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-deb-haaland-national-climate-advisor-gina-mccarthy-discuss-investments>> [Accessed 16 February 2022].

by coal mines alone. Not only will the Act fund clean-up efforts of these polluted areas, it is also expected to create additional jobs connected with such clean-up efforts.