

AMARGOSA RIVER

THREAT: Mining

STATES: California, Nevada

SUMMARY

The Amargosa River is a desert treasure, delivering life-giving water to local communities and the plants and animals that thrive along its banks. But proposed claystone mining threatens to pollute the river and impact the groundwater essential to the river's flows. The Department of the Interior must approve a mineral withdrawal for the Amargosa River to prevent mining and safeguard the river. At the same time, Congress should designate the Ash Meadows Conservation Area to permanently protect Ash Meadows, Amargosa Valley, and the sovereign lands and sacred waters of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, ensuring long-term stewardship of groundwater, biodiversity, and communities across the Amargosa River Basin.

THE RIVER

The Amargosa River is a ribbon of life flowing through one of the hottest and driest places in North America. From its headwaters in the Oasis Valley of Nevada, the river continues south through California's Mojave Desert, curves north into Death Valley National Park, and ultimately terminates in Badwater Basin. Though it flows mostly underground, the river provides critical water and habitat for a variety of plants and animals, many of which can't be found anywhere else on earth. Federally endangered species such as the Devils Hole pupfish, Amargosa vole, and Amargosa niterwort all depend on the Amargosa River and the connected groundwater and springs. Without its water, this fragile web of life collapses.

The Amargosa River is a living part of the ancestral homelands of the Timbisha Shoshone, Southern Paiute, Pahrump Paiute, and Chemehuevi Tribes. The Timbisha Shoshone retain sovereign lands in this region, and their communities continue to rely on the Amargosa River for drinking water, food, medicine, and cultural practices.

Low-income and rural communities in both Nevada and California rely on the Amargosa River's groundwater as a primary drinking source and to support the local tourism economy.

THE THREAT

Proposed mining near the headwaters of the Amargosa River and along the borders of Ash Meadows threatens the groundwater that sustains the Amargosa River, putting local communities and already endangered species at risk. St. Cloud Mining's Ash Meadows Mine project and Lhoist North America's Amargosa Valley Mine are proposing to expand claystone mining operations. There are also hundreds of active mining claims for lithium on the border of Ash Meadows. These

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TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/
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projects involve large-scale extraction of claystones used for a variety of industrial and commercial purposes due to their absorptive qualities. Current proposals involve exploratory drilling and mining of these minerals to or below the water table and may entail pumping of groundwater out of an open pit to access the ore. The best available science has shown clearly that dewatering of open pits may put groundwater-fed springs in Ash Meadows and Death Valley National Park at risk of destabilization or drying, which would be catastrophic for the river's fragile wildlife.

Mining activity also threatens the

land, water, and wildlife sacred to the area's Tribal Nations. What's more, many local residents already face domestic well failures from historic groundwater depletion. Scientific studies suggest that new mining activity has the potential to worsen these inequities and may ultimately lead to displacement of these communities.

Public pressure in 2023 halted an initial exploratory drilling threat near Ash Meadows until a full review under the National Environmental Policy Act could occur. In 2025, a bipartisan coalition of Tribes, nonprofits, local governments, and thousands of residents called for a mineral withdrawal for approximately 309,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management land surrounding Ash Meadows, protecting the region from new mining for up to 20 years.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Department of the Interior (DOI) must approve the mineral withdrawal in the next 12 months before temporary protection expires. This action has been formally supported by the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, Nye County, the townships of Amargosa Valley and Beatty, most of Nevada's congressional delegation — Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen, Representatives Steven Horsford, Susie Lee, and Dina Titus — and more than 25 non-profit organizations. It is imperative that the DOI follow through on this opportunity to put in place temporary but essential protections of precious groundwater resources from the harms of new mining on the Amargosa River.

In addition, Congress should take the next necessary step by designating the Ash Meadows National Conservation Area to permanently protect Ash Meadows, Amargosa Valley, and the sovereign lands and sacred waters of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe. Establishing a National Conservation Area is urgently necessary to ensure durable protection and sustainable management of groundwater resources, biodiversity, and the rural and Tribal communities that depend on this extraordinary landscape.

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