



Sustainable Development and Its Influence On Mining Operations On Federal Lands¹ – A Conversation In Plain Language

Sustainable development is about ensuring human well-being while respecting ecosystem well-being and the earth's environmental limits and capacities. It encompasses environmental and social issues, as well as economic activity. These are interrelated and actions in any domain may, over time, impact all aspects of life in the region where we live.

A sustainable development perspective applied to resource management puts multiple use—including conservation, production, remediation, and land stewardship—into a larger, integrated picture of resource management activities. Sustainable development gives us a checklist to work from, such as: What are the environmental and social impacts of an economic proposal? What are the economic and social implications of an environmental regulation?

The continuity of supply of resources obtainable through

mining, and the sound management of these resources and the environment, are essential parts of sustainable development requiring a long-term view. We remain concerned not only about current results and impacts and the well-being of the present generation, but also about cumulative impacts and the well-being of our children and grandchildren. This approach is not new to natural resource managers, but in some cases it is a welcome change for economic production and consumption to be managed with these broader and more long-term values in mind.

Simply put, sustainable development means thinking more broadly and longer-term about our national, corporate, and individual actions and how they relate to our environment and community. It also means regularly checking our progress, as well as learning from experience and studying how we can better

meet human needs. Perhaps more importantly for federal agencies, a sustainable development perspective in resource management gives us the opportunity to create better relationships with and among our stakeholders, including local, state, regional, tribal, corporate, and nongovernment communities of interest. Each of us can contribute knowledge, information, or resources to help us accomplish together what we cannot do alone.

1. Where did the term “sustainable development” originate and how is it defined?

The term sustainable development was introduced in 1980 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It was popularized in “Our Common Future,” the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987), chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway. That report

¹ For the purpose of this document, federal lands are those administered by the Bureau of Land Management (262 million acres) and the Forest Service (194 million acres).