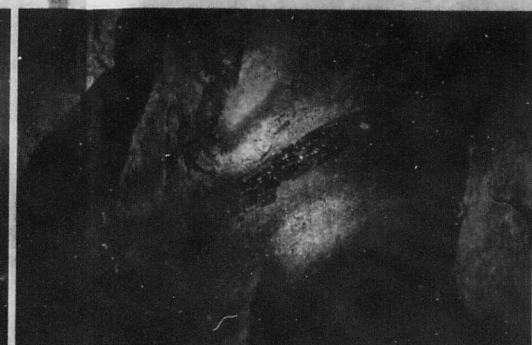


# e: How this time miners and the land



Above right: B. Hemphill and Todd Eldredge survey a wall  
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Moore said that Energy Fuels complies with those monitoring standards and that the company removes the mined uranium-bearing ore from sites before the metal can leech into groundwater.

"All metal mining has inherent hazards and risks to human health, safety and the environment that must be addressed. Uranium mining is no different, and the hazards are well-known and easily mitigated," Moore said. "Today, uranium mining is a relatively low-risk activity."

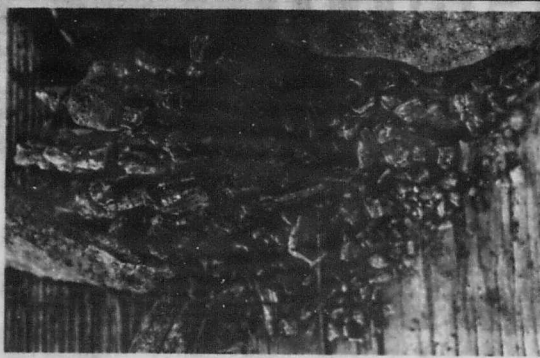
Companies also make plans — and post bonds to support — the eventual closing of a modern mine. Utah law states that mined land must be reclaimed "to prevent conditions detrimental to the general safety and welfare of the citizens of the state and to provide for the subsequent use of the lands affected."

The Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining oversees bonding and reclamation requirements — including the remediation, or clean-up, of contamination or other damage — for when the uranium mine will no longer be in operation.

Energy Fuels estimates that it will cost \$932,000 to eventually reclaim the La Sal Mines Complex, including demolishing the facility and restoring nearly 70 acres of disturbed land. That bond amount will be re-evaluated in 2027.

Those requirements mean mining companies today focus on preventing environmental damage from the start, Barton said.

"It is axiomatic in mining that the ounce of prevention is worth many, many megatons of cure," she said. "What you find in mining



## IMPORTING VS. MINING URANIUM IN THE U.S.

today, which again, was not a thing back in the '80s and '90s, is a fierce dedication to preventing any kind of remediation from being necessary."

Reimondo of the Grand Canyon Trust, like other environmental advocates, remains skeptical. "It's one thing to make a mess and be able to clean it up," said Reimondo. "It's another to make a mess with something that is very difficult, if not impossible, to clean up."

A 2011 report from the Revenue Watch Institute estimates that American Indian lands contain as much as 50% of the U.S.'s potential uranium reserves. Environmentalists and tribal communities have advocated for moratoriums on uranium mining throughout the Colorado Plateau in an effort to prevent potential hazards. These groups also lobby for national monument designations, which can come with bans on extraction.

"We're still losing our loved ones," said Tara Benally, a Diné resident of San Juan County, about the ramifications of the last uranium boom in Utah. "And to have [lawmakers] not see that and understand that is just completely inhumane."

Nuclear power accounted for nearly 19% of the electricity generated nationwide last year. Fossil fuels accounted for 60%, while renewable energy sources, like wind, hydro-power and solar, provided 21%.

The vast majority of the uranium used in American nuclear reactors is imported. The U.S. is home to just 1% of the world's available uranium resources, according to the World Nuclear Association; uranium is "more abundant and cheaper to produce in other countries," the U.S. Energy Information Administration reports.

That argues for less domestic uranium development, Reimondo said.

"On the Colorado Plateau, I think the answer is that we don't need to be doing it here," Reimondo said. "It's too arid, water is too precious and we don't have anything to sacrifice."

But relying solely on imported uranium puts national security — the priority behind the last uranium boom — at risk, the industry contends. In 2022, the U.S. purchased 48% of

its uranium from Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan. Allies Canada and Australia made up 27% and 9%, respectively.

In May, the industry praised President Joe Biden's move to ban on Russian uranium imports, which simultaneously unlocked \$2.7 billion to expand domestic nuclear fuel production.

For Barton, who completed the dissertation for her doctorate on cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, national security isn't the only concern. The U.S. has mining regulations and labor practices that other countries don't, she points out.

"People are, in my experience, a little naive sometimes about the trade-offs involved in the modern lifestyle. There's no free lunch," she said.

"And pretending that there is actually does a lot of damage to the environment and society by pushing that cost onto people who, unlike your average American environmental activist, can't really fight back," Barton said.

"I'm a proponent of keeping mining where we can keep an eye on it," she added.

Demands for energy around the world — and the corresponding emissions — are on track to increase through 2050, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, assuming no new laws or regulations.

Race Fisher — who has seven daughters, none of whom he said are interested in mining — has worked at the La Sal Mines sporadically since the 1980s. He left when uranium prices dropped, but he's been back at the site since 1999. And from his point of view, environmentalists who value clean energy have finally caught up — in recognizing the value of his work.

"I like this type of mining. The area is awesome. You're not going to find a better area than here with all there is to do. It's just a good, clean mining job," he said. "Uranium mining is probably the safest, best ground I've ever worked in."