

Orphan Mines as Compensation

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When planning the construction or expansion of a mine in Canada, the most schedule-limiting permitting process is satisfying the provisions of the federal Fisheries Act, which is administered by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). The provisions require compensation for any fish habitat disturbed or destroyed during mine development. Though DFO has a hierarchy of preferred compensation alternatives, generally only alternatives that involve habitat-for-habitat compensation are considered. This commonly causes delays because most mining operations are in remote locations and the opportunities to provide habitat compensation are limited or would require the alteration of existing pristine environment.

Historic (or orphan) mines constructed and operated during the early days of mining before contemporary environmental and reclamation requirements were developed, provide an

opportunity for mine developers to conduct habitat compensation.

Orphan mines are the responsibility of the government, which must find the resources to reclaim the property. Using orphan mines for habitat compensation provides benefits for all stakeholders, including the government, the mine developer, and the local communities. It also provides modern solutions for historic problems within the mining industry. For the government, habitat compensation offsets some of the costs associated with reclamation. For the mine developers, orphan mines provide a source of habitat compensation opportunities and reduce permitting delays. For local communities, historic mining effects are addressed.

