“Critical Minerals” – Critical Choices:

A Community Guide to Mining Impacts and Decision-Making in British Columbia

BCMLR launch 2019; Photo by Clayoquot Action

Why this Resource Exists

Mining projects in British Columbia—whether for metals, minerals, or so-called “critical minerals” — can have significant environmental, social, cultural, and economic impacts, particularly for Indigenous and rural communities. Governments and industry often promote mining expansion as necessary for the “clean energy transition” or national economic goals. These narratives, however, can oversimplify, misrepresent, or ignore local risks and alternatives.

This guide helps communities engaging with proposed, expanded, or existing mining projects to:

- Understand common claims and narratives about mining, including critical minerals,
- Ask informed questions about environmental, social, and economic impacts,
- Identify where key decisions are made and what information is publicly available, and
- Explore practical strategies to raise awareness, strengthen local power, and participate meaningfully in decision-making.

For detailed evidence, sources, and analysis on claims about “critical minerals” and mining expansion, see **Debunking Myths: “Critical Minerals” and the Energy Transition**.

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Key Principles for Community Discussions

These principles can guide community conversations and strengthen decision-making power when engaging with mining projects—whether they are existing, expanded, or newly proposed. They focus on reducing harm, respecting rights, and ensuring communities have a meaningful voice in assessment, approvals, permits, monitoring, and cleanup:

Reduce demand — through reuse, public transit, and product redesign.
Recover resources — via recycling and re-mining waste.
Rethink extraction — focus only on what's necessary.
Respect Indigenous governance — consent is non-negotiable.
Reject greenwashing — truth matters more than speed.

What Does “Critical Minerals” Really Mean?

The term “critical mineral” is not a scientific or fixed category. In Canada, minerals are labeled “critical” based on perceived supply-chain risk and strategic value — including economic, national security, and military uses, not just renewable energy needs.

Canada’s list includes 34 minerals, many of which:

- are not in danger of being in short supply
- have substitutes or recycling potential
- are not essential for renewable energy
- are used for military, surveillance, or general industrial purposes

Because of this, “critical mineral” mining pressure in B.C. is actually more driven by geopolitics and security concerns than climate action.

Common Claims — and What Communities Should Know

Mining proponents and government messaging often include broad claims about the necessity, safety, or benefits of “critical minerals.” While some statements may be partially true, many oversimplify, misrepresent, or omit key impacts. Understanding the context and evidence behind these claims helps communities ask informed questions, identify gaps, and engage critically in decision-making.

“Critical minerals are essential for the clean energy transition.”

Not all minerals on Canada’s list are required for decarbonization. The label is broad, political, and includes minerals used for military, industrial, and technological purposes.

“We must open new mines — there’s no alternative.”

Alternatives exist but are largely ignored in government strategy:

- recycling and reuse of EV batteries and e-waste
- re-mining tailings and old mine sites
- better product design and longer lifespans
- public transit and reduced car dependency

Common Claims (continued)

“Mining is green compared to fossil fuels.”
Mining produces massive amounts of toxic waste, threatens water systems, fragments ecosystems, and creates long-term environmental liabilities. Mine wastes remain hazardous for generations.

“Electric vehicles are the solution.”
EVs reduce tailpipe emissions but are mineral-intensive and do not address car dependency, low recycling rates, or unequal access. Buses, e-bikes, and smaller vehicles are an important part of the solution, as they require far fewer minerals.

“B.C. has world-class mining regulations.”
B.C.’s record includes tailings dam failures, ongoing pollution from active and abandoned mines, weak enforcement, and laws that still allow mineral claims without Indigenous consent. In important areas, other jurisdictions have better regulations — and better enforcement.

“Critical mineral mining advances reconciliation.”
Reconciliation is not achieved through extraction. Court decisions confirm B.C.’s mining regime conflicts with UNDRIP. True reconciliation requires the ability to say yes, no, or not yet.

“Everyone benefits.”
Impacts are local and unequal. Indigenous and rural communities bear environmental and cultural harms, while profits largely flow to shareholders. Jobs and revenues are frequently over-promised.

“Regulation is the problem.”
Evidence shows most project delays are caused by economic factors, not environmental assessments.

“We need to act fast.”
Urgency is being used to weaken safeguards and bypass consent, increasing long-term risks and public cleanup costs.

For more detailed evidence, sources, and analysis on the common claims listed above, see: **Debunking Myths: “Critical Minerals” and the Energy Transition**.

Decision-Making and Where to Find Information in B.C.

Effective community engagement requires understanding both **who makes decisions** about mining projects and **where to access reliable information**. Decisions are made at provincial and federal levels, covering environmental assessments, permits, compliance, and monitoring. Accessing public databases and registries allows communities to track project approvals, monitor impacts, review enforcement actions, and participate meaningfully in oversight and advocacy throughout a mine's life cycle.

1. Environmental Assessment (Project Review Stage)

Mines that meet the production threshold must undergo a B.C. Environmental Assessment (EA) under the Environmental Assessment Act. Although not commonly used, the 2018 EA Act also allows ministers to designate a project as reviewable based on specific project elements or requests from affected Indigenous Nations or communities.

Some projects may also trigger a federal impact assessment under the Impact Assessment Act. In many cases, these projects are referred to the B.C. process as a substitution, meaning one coordinated review occurs.

Where to Find EA Information

EPIC (Environmental Assessment Project Information Centre)
EPIC lists reviewable projects and provides:

- Applications and technical studies
- Proponent responses
- Public comment opportunities
- Decision records
- EA certificates and conditions
- Certificate amendments
- EA compliance inspection records

Projects can be searched by list or through an interactive map.

Canadian Impact Assessment Registry
For projects involving federal review, this registry includes:

- Federal assessment documents
- Public comments
- Decision statements and conditions

Projects can be searched by list or interactive map.

2. Permits and Authorizations (Post-Approval Stage)

Even after an Environmental Assessment certificate is issued, mines require multiple permits and authorizations before construction and operation that set legal limits and conditions (e.g., wastewater discharge limits) the mine must meet.

Major mines require two primary permits:

- *Mines Act* permits (issued by The Ministry of Mining and Critical Minerals)
- Environmental Management Act permits (issued by The Ministry of Environment and Parks)

Where to Find Permit Information

Authorization Management System
The most up-to-date source for Environmental Management Act permits, including:

- Waste discharge permits
- Permit amendments
- Permit conditions.

You can search by proponent name or permit number.
*The most up-to-date public Mines Act permits are found on BC Mine Information (below).

Mine Overview and Status

BC Mine Information
Provides information on major mines, including:

- Mine status (operating, care and maintenance, closed)
- Commodity (e.g., gold, copper, coal)
- Major permits (e.g., under the Mines Act or Environmental Management Act)
- Inspection records
- Annual reports (including reclamation reports and dam safety inspections)

Projects can be searched by list or interactive map.

3. Compliance, Enforcement, and Appeals

Monitoring and enforcement continue throughout a mine's life — and after closure.
Where to Find Inspection and Enforcement Records

Natural Resource Compliance and Enforcement Database (NRCED)
Provides information on:

- Inspections
- Orders
- Administrative penalties
- Sanctions
- Court convictions

Includes records from the Environmental Assessment Office, the Ministry of Mines and Critical Minerals, and the Ministry of Environment and Parks.

Recent Administrative Penalties and Prosecutions under the Mines Act
Provides a summary of recent penalties and prosecutions issued by the Ministry of Mines and Critical Minerals under the Mines Act; for full details or older violations, use NRCED (above).

Recent Administrative Penalties under the Environmental Management Act
Includes a summary of recent penalties issued by Ministry of Environment and Parks; for full details or older violations, NRCED (above).

Appeals of Penalties

Environmental Appeal Board
Contains records of appeals related to administrative penalties, including cases involving both mining and environmental legislation.

The most up-to-date source for Environmental Management Act permits, including:

- Waste discharge permits
- Permit amendments
- Permit conditions.

You can search by proponent name or permit number.

4. Environmental Monitoring Data

Monitoring whether a mine is following the law is essential for community oversight. Communities can directly review environmental monitoring information.

Water Quality Monitoring

Environmental Monitoring Data System
Provides access to environmental monitoring data, including water quality results. You can use the web reporting tool to search for and download monitoring data by location name (e.g., mine name), monitoring site number, or environmental permit number.

5. Regional Mines (Exploration, Placer, and Quarry Projects)

Not all mines in B.C. are "major mines." Many are smaller mineral or coal projects that don't meet the threshold for an EA, mines at the exploration stage, placer mines, or quarries for sand, gravel, construction materials, and industrial minerals. These projects still require monitoring and public engagement, though they often have fewer regulatory requirements than major mines.

Where to Find Regional Mine Information

Regional Mines Public Engagement Portal
Lists Notice of Work (e.g., exploration) permit applications that are open for public comment. Provides:

- Project name and location
- Proponent information
- Public comment periods
- Project status

BC Mines Regional Offices
Contact the appropriate regional office or the general mine inquiries line for information on:

- Mines in the exploration stage, placer mines, and quarries
- Mines too small to require an Environmental Assessment or be considered "major mines"

6. Other Key Resources

These databases and publications provide additional technical, geological, and economic information about mines and mineral occurrences in B.C.

MINFILE
Provides information on metallic, industrial mineral, and coal mines, deposits, and occurrences, including:

- Geological data
- Location information
- Economic context

BC Geological Survey Information Circulars
Includes annual "provincial overview of exploration and mining" reports, with:

- Project names and owners
- Recent exploration activities
- Permit updates

7. Map Tools

Mapping tools allow communities and researchers to visualize and analyze mine-related data alongside environmental and land-use datasets.

Mineral Titles Online (MTO)
Interactive map to explore:

- Mineral, coal, and placer tenures
- Claim status
- Project boundaries

iMapBC
Provides access to multiple provincial datasets, including:

- Mineral tenures
- Notice of Work (i.e., exploration permits)
- MINFILE occurrences
- Environmental overlays (e.g., caribou range, fish occurrences)
- Land designations (e.g., Ungulate Winter Range)

MapPlace
Focuses on geoscience and mineral resource information, including:

- Geological maps
- Mineral deposits
- Exploration and mining data

How Communities Can Use These Tools

These resources can help your community:

- Prepare for public comment periods
- Track whether approval conditions are being met
- Understand permit limits and discharge standards
- Review inspection and enforcement history
- Monitor water quality and other environmental indicators
- Inform leadership and community decision-making
- Support advocacy, research, and accountability efforts

Using these public databases strengthens community knowledge and supports informed engagement at every stage of a mining project's life cycle — from assessment to operation to closure and cleanup.

Questions Communities Should Ask About Proposed Mines or Mine Expansions

Mining projects are often presented as technical or inevitable decisions. In reality, they involve policy choices, economic assumptions, environmental risks, and long-term community consequences. Asking informed, specific questions helps communities clarify impacts, identify gaps, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes.

Purpose and Need

- What minerals are being extracted and where will processing occur?
- What are the intended end uses for the materials being mined?
- What assumptions are being made about future demand and prices — and what happens if they're wrong?

Environmental Risk

- How much waste will be produced, and how will it be stored and managed?
- What tailings storage system is proposed, and what are the worst-case failure risks?
- How will contaminated water be managed — including any reliance on dilution — and what are the potential downstream impacts? Will the project require water treatment in perpetuity?

- How do climate and seismic risks affect safety over the proposed mine's full life, including after closure?
- Are cumulative impacts from nearby or past projects assessed?
- Who is responsible for monitoring, maintenance, and cleanup if the company leaves or fails?
- Is the project subject to an environmental assessment or other formal reviews? If not, why not?
- What environmental and health risks will remain after the mine is closed? How are these risks being planned for and mitigated?

Indigenous Rights and Governance

- Has Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) been obtained?
- Are Indigenous governments' rights to say yes, no, or not yet being respected?
- How does the project align with UNDRIP, DRIPA, and Indigenous laws and land-use plans?
- How are cumulative impacts on rights and title assessed, including impacts on neighbouring Nations? How are these being addressed?\

Community Impacts

- How many local jobs are being promised, for how long, and under what conditions? Will the workforce be FIFO/DIDO (Fly-in, Fly-out/Drive-in, Drive-out)?
- How will costs and benefits be distributed and measured within the community?
- What impacts will there be on housing, health care, infrastructure, and emergency services?
- What legally binding commitments exist, including if the project changes ownership?
- What is the plan for the community after mine closure?

Economics, Liability, and Public Cost

- What public funding, infrastructure, or incentives are being provided?
- Is reclamation bonding sufficient, independently verified, and bankruptcy-proof?
- Is there adequate financial coverage for any potential accidents or spills?
- Who pays for long-term care if perpetual treatment is required? Are there provisions for climate adaptations and impacts?
- Is the project being fast-tracked or structured to avoid full review?

Using These Questions

Communities can use these questions as a checklist when attending public meetings, reviewing Environmental Assessment documents, submitting comments, or engaging with government and mining companies. Keeping them handy ensures that concerns about environmental, social, and economic impacts — as well as Indigenous rights and long-term liability — are raised consistently and clearly. Well-prepared questions strengthen community participation, accountability, and influence over decisions that affect local lands, resources, and futures.

Tactics to Raise Awareness and Organize

Communities do not need formal authority to influence decisions about mining projects. By building knowledge, sharing stories, organizing collectively, and engaging with decision-makers, residents can strengthen visibility, accountability, and local power. The following tactics provide practical ways to raise awareness, monitor impacts, and advocate for safer, fairer outcomes.

1. Community Education

- Host info sessions, workshops, or webinars to share facts and questions.
- Use clear visuals: maps of mining sites, diagrams of tailings impacts, or recycling alternatives.
- Share short, easy-to-read fact sheets or one-page handouts.

2. Storytelling and Media

- Collect personal stories of environmental, cultural, or health impacts.
- Draft op-eds or pitch stories to local newspapers or radio.
- Create short videos or share key information on social media.
- Share your material with BCMLR so we can help amplify!

3. Building Coalitions

- Partner with local environmental groups, Indigenous governments, and justice organizations.
- Form networks to share legal, technical, or financial resources.
- Coordinate campaigns for joint letters, petitions, or public statements.

4. Political Engagement

- Write letters or request meetings with MLAs, municipal councils, and federal MPs.
- Submit comments on Environmental Assessments (EA) and public consultations.
- Monitor Bill 15 or other legislation that could fast-track mining projects.

5. Public Actions and Awareness Events

- Organize community forums, town halls, or open house events.
- Hold peaceful marches, rallies, or art installations to visualize impacts.
- Use signage or banners near mining-impacted areas to engage the wider public.

6. Leverage Legal and Research Tools

- Track permits, inspections, enforcement decisions, and mineral claims through provincial registries (see above section).
- Support or participate in community-led environmental monitoring.
- Consult court rulings, like Gitxaała or Blueberry River First Nations, to support advocacy.

7. Contacting Your Local MLA

Even though MLAs are not the final decision-makers on mining projects, they can raise concerns, request reviews, and influence government priorities.

- Request meetings with your MLA (in person or virtual) to raise concerns about projects and community impacts.
- Send coordinated letters or emails highlighting environmental, Indigenous rights, and long-term liability issues.
- Ask MLAs to raise issues in the Legislature or caucus and request briefings from relevant ministries.
- Attend town halls, open houses, or public events to ask questions on the record.
- Follow up with written summaries documenting concerns and any commitments made
- Share MLA responses with the community to build transparency and collective awareness.
- Find your local MLA.

Taking coordinated action—whether through education, media, coalition-building, or political engagement—helps ensure community voices are heard and respected. Even small steps, like attending a town hall, submitting comments, or sharing monitoring data, can have meaningful impact. Using these tactics consistently empowers communities to protect local lands, rights, and long-term well-being.

Final Note

A clean energy transition that undermines Indigenous rights, damages ecosystems, and concentrates benefits elsewhere is not a just transition. Communities have the right to slow projects down, demand transparency, and challenge claims that mining expansion is inevitable.

This resource is a starting point for engaging with existing and proposed mining projects in B.C. For more detailed evidence, sources, and analysis, see:
Debunking Myths: "Critical Minerals" and the Energy Transition

Support and information:

We're here to answer questions, share resources, and support communities navigating mining projects in B.C. **Send us a message at: info@reformbcmining.ca.**