

BATS OF WESTERN ABANDONED MINES

Photo: BCI / Shawn Thomas



A drift in an abandoned mine, with an ore chute above ore cart rails.

BACKGROUND

The western United States is rich in mining history, with hundreds of thousands of abandoned mines dotting today's landscape. Many of these mines date back to the 1800s when the discovery of gold, silver, and other ores drew fortune seekers and fueled westward expansion. Mining towns were seemingly built overnight and thrived while the mining boom persisted, but eventually the mines went bust, and the townsfolk moved on, leaving empty buildings and streets. The ghost towns aren't all that remain today; the abandoned mines are equally strong reminders of the mining legacy, and some foster a new cycle of opportunity.



Photo: BCI / Shawn Thomas

BCI Subterranean Specialists search for evidence of bat use while surveying an abandoned mine.

FROM MINING TO BAT HABITAT

Bats are vital to our ecosystem, providing pest control, pollination, and seed dispersal services that are essential to the survival of numerous plant and animal species. In many parts of the world, bats are being threatened by habitat loss, disturbance, disease, and even deliberate destruction due to harmful myths and unwarranted fears. These threats make protecting bats and their ecosystems more imperative than ever. Abandoned mines around the world provide important bat habitat, especially in the western U.S., where subterranean-obligate bat species depend on underground roosts. The long-term protection of mines is critical, as bat populations struggle against pressures that threaten their survival.

Photo: BCI / Nate Dreese



A BCI Subterranean Specialist rappels down a mine shaft to document potential bat habitat.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD BAT ROOST?

Subterranean bats seek different types of habitat depending on time of year and life cycle. During the warm season when bats give birth to pups, bat colonies cluster together in hot, humid conditions to form maternity roosts. During the winter, bats in cold climates seek deep, dark areas of mines where they can hibernate until spring. Abandoned mines with complex internal workings provide diverse habitat options that offer year-round bat protection.



Photo: BCI / Shawn Thomas

Two myotis bats cluster together in hibernation to survive the winter in an abandoned mine.

UNDERGROUND MINING TERMS

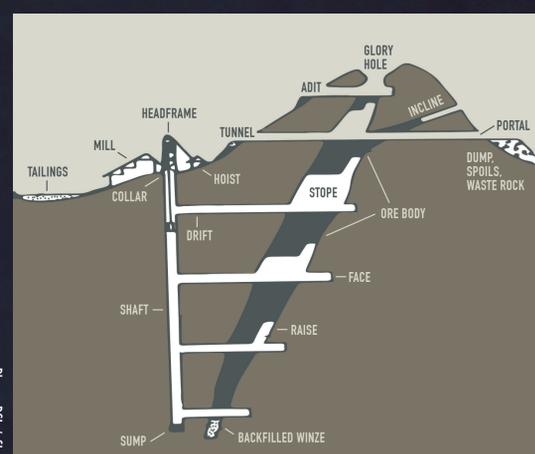


Diagram: John Burghardt

HABITAT PROTECTION

Today, the Abandoned Mine Lands Program of the Bureau of Land Management, in partnership with Bat Conservation International and other agencies and organizations, works to protect important bat habitat while securing hazardous mines to improve public safety. Experts from BCI's Subterranean Program conduct biological surveys to identify abandoned mines that offer the best habitat for bats and other wildlife. Protecting these sites also preserves the cultural legacy of the mining era.

COMMON BAT SPECIES FOUND IN ABANDONED MINES



Fringed myotis
(*Myotis thysanodes*)



California leaf-nosed bat
(*Macrotus californicus*)



Cave myotis
(*Myotis velifer*)



Big brown bat
(*Eptesicus fuscus*)



Pallid bat
(*Antrozous pallidus*)



Townsend's big-eared bat
(*Corynorhinus townsendii*)