



A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS FROM MINING IN LIBERIA

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Forest Trends, a Washington DC-based NGO, examined the local impacts caused by the mining sector on Liberia's environment, on those communities most impacted by mining, and by the Government of Liberia (GoL). This briefing describes the environmental impacts.

Unfortunately, a lack of transparency means that it is difficult to quantify most of these losses. However, Forest Trends' [Rapid Assessment of Liberia's Mining Sector](#) mapped, for the first time, the overlap between mining license areas and forest designations (protected areas, logging concessions, and community forests). This shows that mining undermines Liberia's national and international obligations to reach the goal of [protecting 30 percent](#) of its land area by 2030 and its ability to meet its climate change mitigation goals including [reducing its deforestation](#) rate by 10 percent.

DATA SOURCES

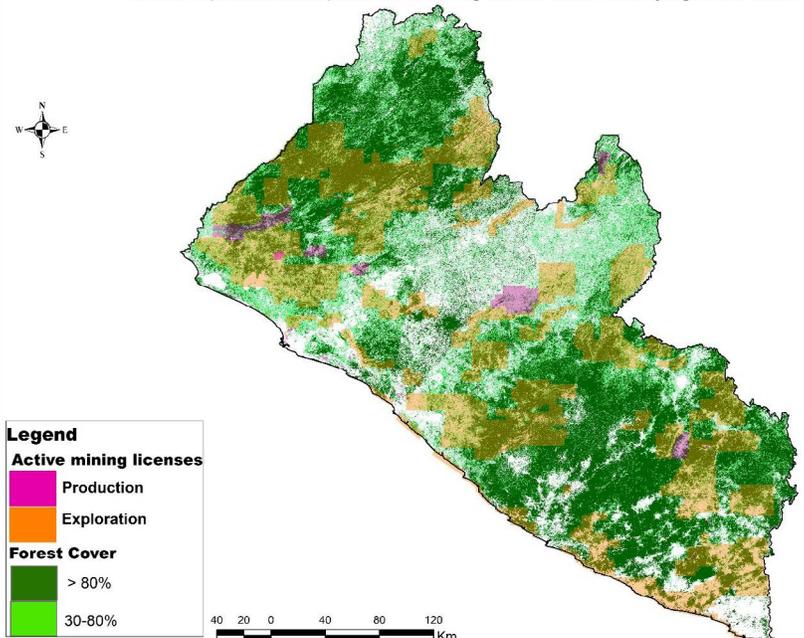
The *Assessment* used data from the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI), the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Metria & GeoVille Liberia Land Cover and Forest Mapping, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Central Bank of Liberia, the Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA), and the Ministry of Mines & Energy (MME). Spatial data was taken from April (MME) and June (FDA) 2025. Forest cover data is from 2014.

FOREST DEGRADATION

The *Assessment* found that at one time or another, almost all the forests of Liberia have been at risk from mining. In 2025, mining licenses overlapped more than 2 million hectares of forests across Liberia. In fact, this dramatically under-estimates the extent of impacts because the MME does not report on the location of artisanal (Class C) mines, and unlicensed mining, which appear to be widespread.

While the presence of a mine may not mean the complete destruction of a forest, undoubtedly the impacts are widespread (see below). For example, the EPA [found](#) that many Class B mines "were using heavy machines such as dredges and earthmovers without proper environmental permits... [The E]quipment used by the miners pose a serious danger to the environment, often polluting water bodies and communities and also causing deforestation."

Active exploration and production mining license areas overlaying forest cover



CONFLICT WITH PROTECTED AREAS

The MME has given out licenses in areas proposed for protection, arguing “that they may not become parks.” The FDA has also successively reduced these areas, in part to facilitate mining. For example, one of the *Assessment’s* case studies shows a large reduction in the proposed Kwa protected area to allow for mining, threatening its ecological integrity.

The local Representative for the area around [Sapo](#) National Park has also [called](#) for its de-gazettement in favour of its mining potential. Fortunately, the heads of the [EPA](#) and [FDA](#) have voiced strong support for the park.

In another case study, some community representatives have advocated for decreased protection to facilitate increased economic activity. However, communities in areas with existing mines are not as sanguine, arguing that mining companies, absent effective enforcement, often pollute the environment and fail to deliver on promised benefits. Ironically these communities are often in favour of increased conservation as a way to reduce pollution and provide economic gain through improved farming techniques, climate finance, and ecotourism. Regardless, mining companies and the GoL must not raise unrealistic expectations for what the sector can deliver to communities, otherwise conflict will result.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

An analysis of the Liberia media coverage of mining and forests over the last seven years showed nearly one in three articles had environmental issues as the main theme, including damage to protected areas and community forests, and dangerous effluent discharges. For example, one article reported cyanide poisoning seriously affecting 30 citizens in 2018, all of whom are likely to suffer long term effects.

A further third of the articles had illegal mining as the main theme, almost all of which reported environmental damage as a consequence. These reports are backed by the widespread violations found during EPA’s nationwide environmental monitoring and compliance tour, [conducted](#) in May 2025. More recently, [AP’s](#) investigation reported in early 2026 that Liberia’s largest gold miner, Bea Mountain Mining Corp., “repeatedly spilled dangerous chemicals.”

Continued neglect of environmental regulations suggests insufficient penalties and the need for more resources for official monitoring and enforcement functions.

SUMMARY

It is impossible to identify or quantify all environment impacts due to the lack of monitoring and reporting by mining companies and the GoL. However, as shown in the *Forest Trends Rapid Assessment of Liberia’s Mining Sector*, and summarized here, what reporting there is indicates that direct deforestation tied to mining, poor management of dangerous chemicals, water pollution, and insufficient resources for monitoring and enforcement should all be major concerns for the government and people of Liberia. Further, mining continues to undermine Liberia’s national and international obligations to secure the environment for future generations and to meet its climate change mitigation goals.

The Assessment can be found at Forest Trends website:

<https://www.forest-trends.org/publications/liberia-rapid-assessment-of-the-mining-sector/>

Forest Trends works to conserve forests and other ecosystems through the creation and wide adoption of a broad range of environmental finance, markets, and other payment and incentive mechanisms. This report was released by Forest Trends’ Forest Policy, Trade, and Finance program, which seeks to create markets for legal forest products, while supporting parallel transformations away from timber and other commodities sourced illegally and unsustainably from forest areas.

Other publications can be found at www.forest-trends.org.