

# Mining in Clear Creek County



## History

On January 5, 1859, during the Colorado Gold Rush, prospector George A. Jackson discovered placer gold at the present site of Idaho Springs, where Chicago Creek empties into Clear Creek. It was the first substantial gold discovery in Colorado. Jackson, a Missouri native with experience in the California Gold Fields, was drawn to the area by clouds of steam rising from some nearby hot springs. Jackson kept his find secret for several months, but after he paid for some supplies with gold dust, others rushed to "Jackson's diggings". The location was originally known as "Jackson's Diggings". Once the location became a permanent settlement, it was variously called "Sacramento City", "Idahoe", "Idaho City", and finally "Idaho Springs".

The first placer discoveries were soon followed by discoveries of gold veins in the rocks of the canyon walls on both sides of Clear Creek. Hard rock mining became the mainstay of the town and the County long after the gold-bearing gravels were exhausted.

## What Can I Do and Build on a Mining Claim?

It depends how it is zoned.

The zoning of the mining claim will tell you the permitted uses allowed and what can be constructed on it. In most scenarios, you cannot use a mining claim to store materials, equipment and possessions. Storage of materials is not an allowed use. Many mining claims are zoned for mining only (M-2). Other mining claims are zoned for mining and may be used to construct a single-family residence (M-1).

Mining will usually require a mining permit from the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety (DRMS) and a mining permit is required if you want to build a mining-related structure or store mining equipment/materials on your mining claim. A single-family residence requires permitting from the County. If you intend to purchase a mining claim to build on, research the property before you buy it! Contact the Planning Department to verify the zoning of the mining claim and what you can build on it.



## **How can I Access my Mining Claim?**

Sometimes access is the biggest problem.

Access to mining claims can be difficult. There are many obstacles that can impede easy access. Many mining claims are accessed by 4-wheel drive and non-maintained roads. You may need to cross private property to access certain mining claims, which could and probably will require an easement. Likewise, there may be issues with the ability to install a driveway. It is best to contact the County Engineer to discuss driveway and access issues.

## **Mining Claims: private property with Surface and Mineral Rights**

Mining Claims can have surface rights and sub-surface rights. You may be buying one or the other, or both. If you have questions about surface rights or mineral rights contact the Assessor's Office for a Property Records Search:

Clear Creek County Assessor's Office - Property Records Search  
405 Argentine St. PO Box 2000 Georgetown, CO 80444 303.679.2322  
<https://www.clearcreekcounty.us/188/Assessor>

Special Warning to residential users of M-1 zoned mining lands: Mining lands may have physical hazards and environmental issues associated with past mineral exploration,

production, and processing. Additionally, patented mining properties used for residential purposes remain subject to the provisions of Colorado State and Federal Mining Laws regarding rights-of-way, drainage, extralateral rights, and other provisions. Finally, mineral exploration, development, or processing may occur on adjacent or nearby lands at any time.



## **Gold Panning in Clear Creek County**

Gold panning (a person with a pan - no sluice box, no dredge suction pumps) is allowed on Clear Creek County Open Space land and on United States Forest Service (USFS) land. If you pan for gold on private property, it should be with the consent of the property owner.

If the hunt for gold goes beyond “a man with a pan,” the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety (DRMS) and the USFS may require the filing of Notice of Intent to Prospect. The Forest Service would also advise individuals to do research to determine if someone else may already be prospecting on an unpatented claim in their specific area of interest.

Please contact the following agencies for guidance:

**Colorado Division of Mining, Reclamation and Safety (DRMS)**

The Centennial Building  
1313 Sherman St., Room 215

Denver, CO 80203  
Phone: 303.866.3567  
<https://www.colorado.gov/drms>

**Arapahoe National Forest - Clear Creek Ranger District**

101 Chicago Creek Rd.  
Idaho Springs, CO 80452  
Phone: 303.567.3000  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/arp/recarea/?recid=28372>

Mining is interlaced in Clear Creek County's history! If you are looking at either prospecting or buying a mining claim in Clear Creek County, it is very important to do your research. The Bureau of Land Management Public Lands Information Center contains more information on the location of patented and unpatented mining claims. It also contains master title plats and other records of all mining claims in the State:  
<https://www.blm.gov/media/public-room/colorado>



**Resources:**

**Clear Creek County Zoning Regulations**  
<https://www.clearcreekcounty.us/288/Zoning-Regulations>

**Clear Creek County Building Code**  
<https://www.clearcreekcounty.us/95/Building-Department>

Clear Creek County Site Excavation and Access Standards:  
<https://www.clearcreekcounty.us/96/Site-Development>

Clear Creek County Assessor's Office  
<https://www.clearcreekcounty.us/188/Assessor>

Colorado Division of Mining, Reclamation and Safety (DRMS)  
<https://www.colorado.gov/drms>

Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Office  
<https://www.blm.gov/media/public-room/colorado>

Arapahoe National Forest – Clear Creek Ranger District  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/arp/recarea/?recid=28372>

**Please contact the Clear Creek Planning Department directly with any  
questions regarding this information**

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**Clear Creek County Planning Department**

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**Phone: 303-679-2430**