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White House commits to U.S. producing clean tech metals

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Published: Thursday, May 27, 2021

The Biden administration expressed a commitment this week to mining metals used to manufacture electric vehicles in the United States, pushing back against suggestions it would look abroad for supply.

The White House infrastructure plan calls for investing \$174 billion "to win the EV market," but mining promoters have wondered whether that plan includes domestic extraction of lithium, nickel, cobalt and other battery minerals.

Ali Zaidi, President Biden's deputy national climate adviser, emphasized that U.S. production is a priority.

"Building American-made EVs and shipping them around the world will include leveraging American-made parts and resources," Zaidi said in an emailed statement Tuesday. "This includes responsibly pursuing, developing, and mining critical minerals and materials used for EV batteries."

Zaidi's comments came after unidentified administration officials **told Reuters** this week the Biden team will look to source EV minerals from allies abroad to avoid environmentalists who oppose mining. Instead of focusing on mining, the United States would aim to process the raw materials into battery parts, according to the report.

"President Biden is once again bowing to pressure from environmental activists and abandoning American workers," Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the top Republican on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said in response.

House Natural Resources Committee Republicans have been critical of some decisions the Biden administration has made on mining.

Rep. Bruce Westerman of Arkansas, the panel's top Republican, aired grievances with four colleagues in a **letter** to Biden last month (***E&E Daily***, April 29).

In March, they noted, the Agriculture Department indefinitely delayed a land swap that is slated to give ownership of federal land in Arizona to Rio Tinto PLC and BHP Group Ltd. that would allow the two mining giants to extract copper. The parcel is sacred to Western Apache tribes.

And in April, the Interior Department paused a series of last-minute Trump administration orders that would have opened about 28 million acres of public land in Alaska to mining (***Greenwire***, April 15).

The Energy Department, however, has invested in domestic mineral supply. It announced \$19 million in grants last month for projects targeting critical minerals, such as extracting rare earth elements from coal and coal waste.

DOE in March announced another \$30 million to research the properties of rare earths, which are used in EV batteries and wind turbines.

The International Energy Agency has warned the world is facing a shortfall of minerals because the proliferation of EVs, wind turbines and solar panels will cause demand to skyrocket ([Greenwire](#), May 5).

Biden has said one of his top priorities is to create well-paid union jobs as part of his goal to transition away from fossil fuels. United Steelworkers International President Tom Conway said he verified with the White House that the goal also applies to miners.

"The USW this week confirmed with the Biden administration that it shares this vision, that investing in domestic extraction, processing and recycling are all part of its plan to build out domestic supply chains and secure the industries and jobs of the future," Conway said in a news release.

Just four months into Biden's tenure, it's unclear what mining projects the administration would favor. Environmental reviews for mines typically take more than two years to complete.

Federal agencies are considering several projects opposed by some environmentalists, such as Antofagasta PLC's copper-nickel proposal in Minnesota and Perpetua Resources' gold-antimony project in Idaho.

Ioneer Ltd. hopes to develop a lithium deposit in western Nevada, where conservationists are working to protect a rare wildflower. The project, which targets a key EV raw material, could also be a test case for the Biden administration.

Bernard Rowe, Ioneer's managing director, welcomed Zaidi's comments about domestic mining. "It just makes sense from an environmental, climate, security and cost perspective," he said in a news release.

And the National Mining Association's president, Rich Nolan, said it's prudent to mine in the United States and import from allies because of the volume of materials needed to build out supply chains.

"It is clear that they understand that sourcing the minerals needed to transform our transportation and energy sectors isn't a case of 'either-or' — it's 'and,'" Nolan said in an email.

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