

Rhyolite Ridge lithium mine project northwest of Las Vegas loses biggest investor

by: [Greg Haas](#)

LAS VEGAS ([KLAS](#)) — The biggest investor in the Nevada Rhyolite Ridge lithium mine announced Wednesday it is pulling out of the project.

Rhyolite Ridge received approval to begin construction from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) [on Oct. 24, 2024](#) — the first U.S. lithium project approved by the Biden administration. It is expected to go into production in 2028 with the help of a \$996 million loan from the U.S. government.

South Africa-based Sibanye-Stillwater, a multinational company known for gold and platinum mining, cited dropping lithium prices. Markets have been volatile as worldwide efforts to extract the mineral are increasing to supply demand for electric vehicle batteries. Some reports indicate there is actually a glut in the current supply coming from China, Australia and Chile.

Sibanye-Stillwater cited an October project update from Ioneer, the Australian mining giant that owns the Rhyolite Ridge project. The decision appeared to be purely economic.

Lithium prices are currently \$75,750 per ton.

Ioneer said the decision would not affect the project, located in Esmeralda County about halfway between Las Vegas and Reno.



“Ioneer’s focus remains on bringing this world-class project online and will look to move forward with a strong equity partner who can help see the Project into production,” according to a Wednesday

statement. A more detailed statement submitted after this story was posted appears at the bottom of this article.

A week after the BLM approved Rhyolite Ridge, the government was [sued by the Center for Biological Diversity](#), which has been fighting to protect an endangered wildflower known as Tiehm's buckwheat that has only been found at the site of the mine. Ioneer was not named in the lawsuit.

"Sibanye Stillwater's decision to pull out of Rhyolite Ridge highlights all of the problems with this project," Scott Lake, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement.

"The mine poses an existential threat to the only known population of the endangered wildflower Tiehm's buckwheat. Ioneer and the federal officials that approved and funded this project knew the risks but proceeded anyway with a highly irregular and rushed permitting process that violated numerous laws," Lake said.

"We need lithium for the green energy transition, but it can't come at the cost of extinction or the scrapping of our bedrock environmental protections. We hope this news prompts federal officials to re-think their unfortunate decision to approve and fund this disastrous project," he said.

Ioneer statement:

"Ioneer has mutually agreed with Sibanye-Stillwater to dissolve our planned joint venture following comprehensive discussions.

Ioneer will undertake a process to identify a strong equity partner to ensure Rhyolite Ridge proceeds to production.

Since our work first began in 2017, Ioneer has successfully navigated a global pandemic and unexpected permitting and project delays, underscoring the strength of our project's economics.

To better respond to potential shifts in the macroeconomic environment, Ioneer adjusted its risk management strategies to prepare for the possibility of scenarios like those we currently face.

Following advancements in the project since 2021, we are confident this development, which is common with projects of this complexity and magnitude, will better allow the company to find a new partner who will meet or exceed the prior equity total.

Rhyolite Ridge is permitted and construction ready, and we are focused on advancing our work to secure a Final Investment Decision. The project's minerology allows for onsite extraction and processing of lithium and boron, making it a once-in-a-generation deposit.

Ioneer owns 100% of the Project and closed a \$996 million loan from the U.S. Department of Energy Loan Programs Office via the Advanced Technology Vehicles Manufacturing program, which remains in force.

We look forward to working with our offtake agreement partners, bringing this project online, and fortifying the nation's domestic supply chains."

— Bernard Rowe, Managing Director, Ioneer