Industry is looking to mine inactive seafloor massive sulfide (SMS) deposits formed through geothermal activity in the Earth's crust. These deposits have high average ore grades of gold, zinc, and copper. While operating in this new environment with high uncertainty, mining companies will have to determine what their impacts will be on habitat and communities at active and inactive SMS deposits.

Impacts may affect communities in three different areas including: (1) communities at the impact site, (2) communities adjacent to the mining site, (3) communities at active hydrothermal vents adjacent to the mining site. As a full scale mining operation has not taken place, there is high uncertainty surrounding the mining of seafloor massive sulfides. Companies will have to determine the magnitude of these impacts through an environmental impact assessment.