

## WALL STREET JOURNAL

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### Heavy Metal Politics

Interior bans new uranium mining in Arizona.

President Obama's Keystone XL abdication (see above) is all too typical of his Administration's general hostility to domestic energy production. Only last week Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced that he is banning new uranium mining on one million acres of federal land in northern Arizona.

The 20-year withdrawal of these lands from "mineral entry" blocks access to hundreds of millions of pounds of the highest-grade uranium ore to be found in the country. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that the northern Arizona parcels contain uranium that, mined to capacity, would generate enough electricity to power Los Angeles for 154 years. Expect the Obama campaign to tell its green funders how the Administration "saved the Grand Canyon" from corporate despoilers as the Presidential race heats up.

What is surprising is the extent to which the mining ban seems to have been made without regard for the Interior Department's own conclusions about the potential environmental effects. According to the Bureau of Land Management's environmental impact statement on the withdrawal, mining would have "no direct impacts" on protected wilderness areas. The impact on drinking-water supply in the Colorado River was also found to be "negligible."

We love the Grand Canyon as much as anyone, but protecting treasured landscapes is not incompatible with job creation and economic growth. Why bother with an environmental impact assessment if the decision was always going to be made for political reasons?

The Administration contends that the withdrawal merely prohibits new mineral entry on the land, and that previously approved projects will still be allowed to go ahead. But mining based on pre-existing rights is restricted to known deposits, the total uranium output of which is a small fraction of the area's potential. The withdrawal also blocks previously claimed sites from being further explored for uranium endowment, meaning that some claimants will not be able to extract full value from their existing rights.

All of this will go over splendidly in an area of northern Arizona with a 17% unemployment rate. The land bureau's impact statement estimates that Mr. Salazar's withdrawal will cost the region \$160 million in average annual economic output—no small change over 20 years. Too bad this Administration remains more focused on pleasing its Sierra Club donors than creating jobs.