

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 5, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
18th and C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

It has come to our attention that advocacy groups have submitted a request to your office regarding mining restrictions in the Arizona Strip. We write to strongly oppose the withdrawal of any part of the Arizona Strip and similar National Forest lands south of the Grand Canyon from mineral entry that would ultimately block further uranium mining in the area.

As you may know, in the period between 1983 and 1984 we worked together with then House Interior Committee Chairman, Mo Udall, Congressman Bob Stump, then Congressman John McCain and Senate colleagues Barry Goldwater and Jake Garn in a thoroughly collaborative process that led to the designation of 285,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and 102,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands as wilderness and for the release of 490,000 acres of BLM lands and 50,000 acres of USFS lands from Wilderness Study Areas. These efforts were carried out with the understanding and intention that this action would allow uranium mining on the BLM and National Forest lands where, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), more than 40 percent of the nation's best uranium potential exists.

This carefully crafted compromise provided new Wilderness designations to ensure that the Grand Canyon watershed was fully protected and allowed mining and grazing to continue in the remaining areas of the region. The agreement led to the passing of the Arizona Wilderness Act by large majorities in both the House and Senate. It is important to note that research conducted by USGS and preliminary findings by the University of Arizona confirm that uranium exploration and mining pose no threat to the Grand Canyon watershed or to the Park.

We believe strongly that the recent calls for a withdrawal of the area and last year's questionable House Natural Resources Committee "Emergency" Resolution violate the spirit of that 1983/84 agreement. Moreover, with depressed market conditions during much of the intervening time between 1984 and today, only five uranium mines have been drilled, mined, and reclaimed. Even with nearly 15,000 claims in the area in question, any future mining will likely follow a similar pattern with only a handful of mines operating at a time.

As you know, a very large proportion of human carbon emissions result from electric power generation. As the nation begins an effort to reduce these emissions, we believe that the continuation of our nation's 90 percent dependence foreign uranium imports would be a dangerous policy, made only more dangerous by any decision that would lock out 40 percent of our best domestic uranium resources.

The mere threat of a withdrawal has already had a negative impact on needed uranium mining activity. As long as this uncertainty remains, no banks will lend money, and prudent company Boards of Directors will not commit financial capital to mining projects on the Arizona Strip and similar lands south of the Grand Canyon. Moreover, the BLM's director of mining has indicated that BLM is unlikely to grant mining companies access to perfect their valid claims under the current scenario.

To break this impasse, we recommend you take the following steps:

- Request a National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council review under Section 204(c) of the Federal Land Management Policy Act to determine whether an objective basis exists to withdraw the lands. Section 204(c) calls for a public process and documentation of the basis, duration and impacts on the environment, local communities and the national minerals policies. Such a process would help ensure decisions are well-informed and public.
- Announce that exploration and mining can continue as envisioned in the 1984 Wilderness Bill agreement provided that companies follow all applicable state and federal environmental laws, including reclamation.

We hope this clarification of the background and agreements which led to the passage of the 1984 Arizona Wilderness bill will be helpful to you. Our late Senate colleague Barry Goldwater loved the Grand Canyon and believed that our actions then provided necessary protections. Time, scientific evidence, and ground mining practices have borne that out.

Sincerely,



Dennis DeConcini
United States Senator (Retired)



Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senator