

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 8, 2009

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
1440 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Grijalva:

We are writing regarding the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act of 2009 (H.R. 644). We are concerned that your proposal to withdraw 1.1 million acres of federal land from all future mineral location, entry and development would violate the spirit of a historic agreement between the mining industry and the environmental community as embodied by the Arizona Wilderness Act, and begin to unravel decades of balanced, responsible resource development and wilderness protection near Grand Canyon National Park.

The Grand Canyon is a powerful and awe-inspiring landscape attracting millions of visitors from the United States and abroad. For this reason, we understand the concerns about mining on federal lands near the Park. Fortunately, a solution to these concerns was devised 25 years ago through the enactment of the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 (P.L. 98-406), and to this day uranium mining activities on the Arizona Strip have a record of productive operation and successful reclamation without impacting the Grand Canyon.

In the early 1980s, the late House Interior Committee Chairman, Morris Udall, led the Arizona congressional delegation, including the late Senator Barry Goldwater and then Congressman John McCain, in crafting legislation to designate 290,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and 834,000 acres of Forest Service lands as wilderness. Chairman Udall initiated an exhaustive collaborative process that included the mining and livestock industries, the National Parks Conservation Association, the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club and other stakeholders that, among other things, ultimately resulted in an agreement on lands that would not be mined in order to protect the Grand Canyon.

This collaborative agreement was one of the principal reasons for the enactment of the Arizona Wilderness Act in the 98th Congress. The Act added over one million acres of land to the National Wilderness Preservation System and provided that mining and grazing in those areas not designated as wilderness be allowed to go forward in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. The Act also directed the release of 490,000 acres of BLM lands and 50,000 acres of Forest Service lands from wilderness study with the full understanding and intention that this action would allow uranium mining on the Arizona Strip and the Kaibab National Forest.

Unfortunately, some of our friends in the environmental community have apparently decided not to acknowledge the 1984 agreement that Chairman Udall worked so hard to assemble. They've argued that a land withdrawal, much like the proposal under H.R. 644, would only apply to new mining claims. The reality is that the mere threat of a withdrawal has had effects similar to the consequences of closing these lands to mining. For example, banks are growing reluctant to lend money for mineral exploration and development and the mining industry is hesitant to commit financial capital to projects. The kind of heavy-handed government interference your bill proposes would also likely make subsequent validation of existing mining claims problematic.

Ensuring the protection of the Grand Canyon is the duty of every Arizonan. We have spent our entire careers both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate working to preserve its natural beauty for future generations. Fortunately, Chairman Udall successfully struck the proper balance between conservation and public use of lands outside of the Grand Canyon National Park. As Chairman Udall stated on the House floor on April 2, 1984, the Arizona Wilderness Act was "an extraordinary example of what cooperation and compromise between business and conservation groups can produce, even when the subject is as emotional and controversial a subject as wilderness." We strongly urge you to consider the implications that H.R. 644 would have on this historic achievement.

Sincerely,



John McCain
United States Senator



Jon Kyl
United States Senator