

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

November 3, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The United States Department of Agriculture Final Report Pursuant to Executive Order 13783 on Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth (report) recommends revising Public Land Order No. 7787, which initiated a 20-year moratorium on new mining claims on federal land within the Grand Canyon Watershed. As you likely know, Interior Secretary Salazar ordered the withdrawal in 2012 after an extensive environmental review and public outreach process.

The report, however, offers no analysis or justification for lifting the moratorium, despite the fact that the Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) cited a lack of certainty and information regarding the impacts of increased uranium mining in the Grand Canyon watershed as the primary rationale for the 20-year withdrawal. Rescinding the withdrawal now, after only five years, without demonstrating an updated understanding of the available data has the potential to do lasting ecological damage, not to mention irreparable harm to the region's numerous cultural resources.

Native American tribes and leadership organizations – including the National Congress of American Indians and the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona – overwhelmingly support the withdrawal, and many support my bill (H.R. 360) to establish the Greater Grand Canyon National Heritage Area National Monument. The bill permanently bans new mining claims throughout the area. The Grand Canyon is the traditional homeland for seven tribes, all of which have concerns about increased uranium mining. Tribal governments need to be consulted and involved in any decision impacting the region's future.

The Grand Canyon watershed provides drinking water for more than 20 million Americans. Water quality and availability were thoroughly analyzed prior to the 2012 decision. A study by the U.S Geological Survey cited in the EIS found that “samples from 15 springs and

five wells in the region contained dissolved uranium concentrations greater than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency maximum allowed contaminant for drinking water.” Understanding how a revision of the withdrawal impacts water resources is critical.

Lastly, much of the regional economy is dependent on outdoor recreation and tourism. In fact, the EIS emphasizes that “the Grand Canyon and the greater ecosystem surrounding it is the cornerstone of the region’s economy with hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation generating billions of dollars in economy activity in the area.” Unlike uranium mining – an activity that is potentially toxic to those living and working in the area and tends to benefit foreign-owned mining companies – outdoor recreation is a sustainable and thriving part of the regional economy that supports U.S. public lands.

Protecting the Grand Canyon is a priority for Arizonans, and I am extremely concerned about any hasty decisions that threaten its future. In order to better understand how the Agriculture Department arrived at the recommendations in the report, please respond to the following questions:

1. Did the Department consult with affected Native American tribes before issuing its recommendation?
2. Did the Department review potential impacts to water resources as part of the review process?
3. Did the Department review impacts to outdoor recreation and tourism as part of the review?
4. The existing withdrawal is authorized pursuant to Section 204 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and was put in place after compliance with all other applicable laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act. Does the Administration intend to comply with these legal requirements as well?
5. What opportunity will members of the public have to comment on the recommendations included in the report?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member

House Committee on Natural Resources