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Wednesday, May 23, 2012
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Gov't Scientist Believed Impacts from Arizona Uranium Mining "Grossly Overestimated" in Obama Admin Document

Answers sought on whether politics, rather than science, drove Obama Admin's decision to block U.S. energy production

WASHINGTON, D.C. – [Internal emails](#) obtained by the House Natural Resources Committee raise significant questions into the science used by the Obama Administration to justify a 20-year ban on uranium development on one million acres of federal land in Arizona. In the emails, scientists within the National Park Service discuss how the potential environmental impacts were "*grossly overestimated*" in the Administration's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and that the potential impacts are "*very minor to negligible*."

A National Park Service hydrologist wrote in an internal email, "*The DEIS goes to great lengths in an attempt to establish impacts to water resources from uranium mining. It fails to do so, but instead creates enough confusion and obfuscation of hydrologic principles to create the illusion that there could be adverse impacts if uranium mining occurred.*" He notes that "*previous studies have been unable to detect significant contamination downstream of current or past mining operations*" and that "*adverse impacts to water resources*" is not a reason to be concerned about potential uranium mining operations.

Another employee with the National Park Service wrote that this is a case "*where the hard science doesn't strongly support a policy position.*"

"These emails raise serious concerns about whether the Obama Administration's decision to block uranium production in Arizona was based on politics rather than sound science," said House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings. "Developing uranium in the United States will create high-paying jobs, boost the economy, lower our dependence on foreign countries, and support clean American energy. The Administration's unilateral action to block uranium development on this land threatens America's energy security and ignores numerous studies showing that it can be done safely in an environmentally conscious manner."

In response to the emails, Chairman Hastings (WA-04) and Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01) sent a [letter](#) today to the Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar asking for documents, including emails, notes, briefing papers and memoranda, concerning the Draft Environmental Impact

Statement, the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the Record of Decision in support of the Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal. Chairman Hastings also requested that the Department of the Interior provide complete and unredacted copies of 399 pages previously concealed by the Obama Administration in response to a document request in 2009.

Background:

On January 9, 2012, the Obama Administration [announced](#) a 20-year ban on uranium development on one million acres of land in northern Arizona – one of the most uranium-rich areas in the United States. The Administration’s decision to withdraw these areas from uranium mining terminates a long-standing agreement, forged through compromise between mining interest and environmental groups, and carried out through bipartisan legislation that became law in 1984. The agreement allowed certain areas in Arizona to be protected through Wilderness designations, while others were to remain open for uranium production.

In April 2009, then Natural Resources Ranking Member Hastings and then Subcommittee Ranking Member Bishop sent a [letter](#) to the Department of the Interior requesting all documents and correspondence from then Superintendent of the Grand Canyon National Park and the Director of the Grand Canyon National Park Science Center related to correspondence with the news media and several non-profit organizations regarding the withdrawal. The Department’s September 2009 response handled the request as a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request and thus the Department withheld 399 pages “under FOIA’s deliberative process exemption.” However, FOIA law prohibits the Administration from using FOIA exemptions to withhold information from Congress.

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