

Comments by Morris Farr, Vice-President of Save the Scenic Santa Ritas for the legislative hearing on H.R. 2944 of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the Committee on Natural Resources on January 21, 2010.

We want to extend our sincere thanks to Congressman Grijalva and Congresswoman Giffords for introducing the legislation under consideration today. It is extremely important legislation for the future of our part of Arizona

Allow me to introduce myself: I am Morris Farr, Vice President of Save the Scenic Santa Ritas. My wife and I have lived in Sonoita, AZ for almost 15 years since my retirement from the University of Arizona. There I was a professor, Department Head and Assistant Dean in the College of Engineering. I also squeezed in three terms in the Arizona State Senate and two terms as Chair of the Democratic Party in Pima County. I have been active in several civic activities since moving to Sonoita including a couple of years as Chair of the Sonoita Crossroads Forum, an organization that works with Santa Cruz County on planning and land use issues for Sonoita and our nearby sister community of Patagonia. My wife, Molly Anderson, is the “town doc” for Sonoita and Patagonia, practicing at the clinic in Patagonia. Having lived for many years in Tucson before moving to my present location in rural Arizona, I believe that I can express sentiments that reflect both the urban and rural points of view.

Today, I’m speaking on behalf of *Save the Scenic Santa Ritas*, a nonprofit and nonpartisan southeastern Arizona organization that is working to protect the Santa Rita Mountains and other nearby mountain ranges from the environmental degradation caused by mining and mineral exploration. We have actually been in existence for twelve years, ever since we won the last big fight over a copper mine in our area.

Our current major battle is over a second proposal for a huge open pit mine adjacent to an officially recognized scenic highway that serves as the gateway to our communities. I am not here today to discuss the pros and cons of that proposal. In any case, this legislation will not resolve that conflict. The concern that I bring to you today is the prevention of future conflicts over mining in our area. I might add parenthetically that literally every governmental entity in the Greater Tucson area has passed resolutions opposing the currently proposed mine, including two counties, Pima and Santa Cruz, the Tohono O’odham Nation and five cities including Tucson. Of course, we have also enjoyed the support of both Representatives Grijalva and Giffords. A local elected official said recently that he had never seen an issue that had the power to bring so many elected officials together – Republicans and Democrats alike. Personally, I do not know of a single elected official in the area that actually supports the mine.

Our organization is not opposed to mining in general, but has many concerns about, on one hand, huge projects on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area and, on the other hand, the impact on a rural economy oriented toward tourism and recreation. In particular, we have pointed to problems with water quantity and quality, loss of wildlife habitat, air pollution, increased truck traffic and loss of recreation areas – a list that just goes on and on. I could easily take up the rest of your morning, but my role today is to

focus on some of the very negative economic consequences for the area in which I now reside and offer some thoughts on the meaning of mining for the larger region.

Let me tell you a little about the communities of Sonoita and Patagonia. We are located in an area of high grasslands surrounded by oak and juniper woodlands that gradually give way to ponderosa pines and Douglas fir as you climb up the surrounding mountain ranges. We have a culturally and economically diverse population that includes many retirees, ranchers, small business persons and a growing number of people who commute to Tucson for employment. Historically a ranching area, our economy has now shifted to tourism as our leading local industry. If you came to visit us, you would be impressed by the grasslands and mountain scenery and we would be very happy to introduce you to our excellent restaurants, interesting wineries and attractive hotels and B&Bs, take you on hike in the mountains or a horseback ride on the grasslands. The area attracts hikers, birders, hunters and fishermen. Bicycle and motorcycle groups are frequent visitors. I would particularly like to show you the San Rafael Valley, one of the most gorgeous grassland ranch areas in the Southwestern United States, which sadly is threatened by increased interest in mining in the adjacent Patagonia Mountains.

The most important point that I need to make is that short term mining threatens an economy that is sustainable in the long term. Local businesses are selling the ambiance of our surroundings. If we can preserve our scenery and recreational opportunities, the same businesses could be thriving a hundred years from now. Instead, the current proposed mining project will give us a big hole in the ground and a huge pile of rock and they are “out of here” in twenty years.

Dr. Joe Marlowe is an economist who works for the Sonoran Institute, a group funded in large part by developers. They mostly advise rural western communities like ours who are coping with the problems of growth. He wrote a fifty page analysis of the economic effects of mining on our area. I have a favorite quote from his work, referring not just to our area, but to the effect of the most recent mining proposal on the entire Greater Tucson Area. He said “If the proposed project displaced only 1% of this activity (tourism and outdoor recreation), the economic losses would be greater than the entire annual payroll of the proposed project.”

I must comment on another area of major concern. We have many retirees in the Sonoita – Patagonia area, attracted by the scenery and lifestyle. All of us have a substantial part of our life savings invested in our homes – investments that may need to be recouped for medical costs or care facilities as we age further. Property values are a MAJOR concern for all of us, of course including the people who make a living by buying and selling real estate. There is no question in our minds that mining will seriously endanger a very significant part of our life savings.

I have talked mostly about the impact of mining on our rural economy and lifestyles, but finally, let me make some personal observations about the future of our urban Tucson area. I think that a major reason that the current mining proposal has generated such opposition is that mining just simply does not fit with the vision of the area that most of

us have. Tucson is an attractive city with a major university, many high tech research, development and manufacturing enterprises and a major medical center. Even though the metropolitan area now has over a million people, all of them enjoy the striking views of the surrounding mountains and most are just a few minutes away from attractive desert and woodland areas for recreation and relaxation. Those are the reasons that I moved to Tucson forty years ago as a young engineering professor. Even though the population has tripled since then, Tucson still remains a very attractive place for living, working and visiting. Mining, with the unavoidable disturbance of the landscape, the unresolved problems of water and air pollution and the negative impact on traffic and property values just does not fit with the vision of the future that most of us hold.