

Endangering an Industry to Protect a Species that is Not Endangered

LAND WITHDRAWAL

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) is proposing to withdraw up to 10 million acres of land from new mining operations. The reason? To protect the sage grouse, a bird that DOI's own agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has said is not endangered.

Another interesting fact? DOI isn't authorized to take such unprecedented action. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) requires congressional approval if mining activities are to be curtailed by large-scale withdrawals. Specifically, mineral withdrawals of more than 5,000 acres are subject to congressional approval, which the DOI has not received.

The facts:

- DOI has determined that mining is not a major threat to the bird or its habitat.
- DOI has recognized that the mining industry is actively contributing to the protection of the sage grouse. Not only have mining companies entered into sage grouse conservation agreements and conducted award-winning habitat restoration, their active management of mine sites has routinely resulted in improved habitat.
- Research has found that the major threats to the species are wildfires and invasive species, not mining.
- The withdrawal ignores the role that mining companies take in actively managing the federal lands on which they operate. During mine reclamation, mining companies frequently restore low-value habitats into prime potential sage grouse habitat by eliminating invasive species, reducing risks of wildfires and improving breeding areas.

So how will DOI's 10-million-acre mineral withdrawal help the sage grouse? It won't. What it will do is seriously damage domestic mineral security.

Here's how:

- Our import dependence for key mineral commodities has doubled over the past two decades and removing an additional 10 million acres of mineral-rich lands from development would further increase our import dependence. As it is, the U.S. is import dependent on 19 key mineral resources, and more than 50 percent import dependent for an additional 24 mineral commodities – even though we have significant mineral deposits of these commodities within our borders. Less than half of the mineral needs of U.S. manufacturing are met from domestically mined resources. As a result, key domestic industries are unnecessarily vulnerable to disruptions from extended, complex and fragile supply chains.
- Federal lands account for as much as 86 percent of the land area in certain Western states and these same states account for 75 percent of our nation's metals production. Already half of the nation's hardrock mineral estate is either off-limits or under restrictions for mineral development. An additional 10-million-acre withdrawal of federal lands will have a significant impact on the ability to develop domestic minerals on federal lands.