



LETTERS

Giffords, Grijalva: This is what we want Jay Jensen to see

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Anyone who has driven down State Highway 83 knows it traverses some of the most majestic and sweeping vistas in the southeastern part of our state.

Winding its way from Vail to Parker Canyon Lake, the road meanders through a breathtaking landscape that has earned a place of distinction in Stewart M. Green's "Scenic Driving Arizona."

"It's an immense land of faraway views with a pastoral beauty unlike any other Arizona drive," he wrote.

The uniqueness of this area is why we firmly and unequivocally oppose plans by Augusta Resource Corporation to permanently despoil it with an open-pit copper mine. The proposed Rosemont Copper Mine would be a mile-wide, 3,000-foot-deep mistake.

This is exactly the message we will convey to Jay Jensen, a top official with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, when he tours the proposed mine site on Oct. 24.

We asked Jensen, the department's deputy undersecretary for natural resources and environment, to visit the site to more fully understand our concerns as the department prepares a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We want him to experience this precious place for himself and to see why so many Southern Arizonans are so vehemently against the mine.

We are not opposed to all mining but, like many of our constituents, we have been steadfastly opposed to the Rosemont proposal since its inception. We have made our views known to numerous people and in numerous ways, not the least of which is the introduction of legislation to withdraw public land in Pima County from mining use.

Because of issues we have raised, the U.S. Forest Service has extended the EIS timeline, scheduled a series of public hearings and initiated a review of the criteria by which the consultant company was selected. Our action allowed hundreds of citizens to make their views known to the Forest Service. These citizens submitted more than 11,000 questions and issues about the mine plan of operation.

We also have written to the Forest Service to express our serious concerns with how it has conducted the EIS process and its failure to establish a citizen working group to review the public input.

In June, we wrote to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in opposition to the Forest Service opinion that it could not consider a "No Action" decision on the Augusta Mine Plan of Operation. Subsequently, we met with USDA officials to press for a reversal of the Forest Service position.

Deputy Undersecretary Jensen's on-scene visit is the culmination of all of these letters and

meetings. We greatly appreciate the time he is taking to come to Arizona and hear from the people whose quality of life will be directly and negatively impacted if the Rosemont mine is allowed to become a reality.

Our goal is to make sure the Department of Agriculture gets a complete picture of the risks this mine poses to our community. Turning a section of the beautiful Santa Rita Mountains into a waste disposal site would cause irreparable damage to nearby communities, wildlife and archaeological sites.

Wind-swept mine tailings and runoff would pollute our air and groundwater. Noise pollution would result from round-the-clock operations. And traffic hazards would increase because of the fleet of heavy trucks rumbling up and down area roads.

All this would destroy a popular recreation area that contributes significantly to our tourist economy.

Then there is the problem of the mine's water use. Enormous new demands for precious groundwater at a time when the local water table is dropping could be catastrophic. The mine owners expect to pump 100,000 acre-feet of water over 20 years - enough water to supply the needs of 300,000 homes for a year or enough to submerge all 26 square miles of Green Valley six feet deep.

Augusta does not need public approval to remove copper, silver and molybdenum from its big hole. But because of the project's likely environmental consequences, the government should require a full Environmental Impact Statement to assess the potential harm from runoff and other mining byproducts.

To proceed with the mine, Augusta needs government approval to bury nearly 4,000 acres of federal and state land - most of it in the Coronado National Forest - with tons of excavated rocks and dirt.

We stand united in our belief that the environmental and societal effects to our community from Rosemont will be immense and irrevocable. We are hopeful that Deputy Undersecretary Jensen will agree with us once he sees in person what is being proposed.

U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords has represented Arizona's 8th Congressional District since 2007. U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva has represented Arizona's 7th Congressional District since 2003. Visit them at their web sites at www.giffords.house.gov and www.grijalva.house.gov.

The views expressed above are the writers' own and do not necessarily reflect those of this newspaper.

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