



26 October 2017

rporter@blm.gov

Fax: 760-384-5499

ATTN: Randal Porter,
Ridgecrest Field Office,
300 S. Richmond Rd.,
Ridgecrest, CA 93555

Dear Mr. Porter,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Perdito Exploration Project Environmental Assessment that would affect Conglomerate Mesa. These comments are submitted on behalf of Sequoia Forest Keeper and the Kern-Kaweah Chapter Sierra Club.

Conglomerate Mesa is a particularly special place and I am writing to ask you to choose the "no-action" alternative in order to protect the ecological and historical resources found in this area. Just over one year ago the Bureau of Land Management protected these resources by designating them as California Desert National Conservation Land. Prior to this Conglomerate Mesa was proposed to be added to the Malpais Mesa Wilderness, which lies directly south of the project area.

The same reasons that helped protect this area as CDNCL are pertinent to why this drilling project should not proceed:

- Multiple special status and rare plant species are found within the proposed project area and will be negatively impacted by drilling.
- The historic Keeler-Death Valley trail, circa late 1800s, travels through the northern end of Conglomerate Mesa and should be preserved for its cultural and historic significance.
- The area is prized locally for deer hunting.
- Local tribes oppose this project because of the potential to limit and degrade their access to traditional gathering sites.

Furthermore, this area contributes to local tourism and recreation, which remain the primary drivers of Inyo County's economy: total direct travel spending in the desert region in 2013

reached \$6.2 billion. Industries that include travel and tourism comprised 33% of employment in Inyo County. Mining operations here will be in direct conflict with the outdoor tourism industry.

Although this phase of the project is for exploratory drilling, the ultimate objective – should SSR Mining, Inc. make a positive finding – is a large, industrial-scale open pit (cyanide heap leach) gold mine. Such an operation would permanently damage the area's wild character, degrade wildlife habitat, and pollute scarce local water systems. It's well documented that cyanide heap leaching poses significant hazards to plants and animals from gold mining and related toxic water issues.

The fact that the Environmental Assessment does not address the true purpose of this project is troubling. While mining operations in the area could prove profitable to the mining company it is likely to provide only limited local revenue and employment. What will be left behind is lasting environmental damage that will not only scar the land but degrade Inyo County's reputation as a scenic, outdoor recreation destination.

I hope the BLM will weigh these factors heavily in its decision-making for this wild area and decide to deny Perdito's proposal for mineral exploration, citing the unavoidable significant impacts to biological, cultural, and economic resources in the area.

Sincerely,



Mr. Ara Marderosian,

Conservation Chair,
Kern-Kaweah Chapter Sierra Club

And

Executive Director
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