



The Withdrawal of Public Lands from Multiple Land Use Status Threatens Our National and Economic Security

by David F. Briggs

The Multiple Land Use Doctrine as described in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 ensures that our public lands and their various resource values will be utilized in the combination, which best meets the present and future needs of the American people. It also guarantees that our public lands will be made available for all uses, including a wide range of commercial activities as well as being preserved for its watershed, fish and wildlife, natural scenic, scientific and historical values.

Extensive tracts of public lands throughout the western United States have been withdrawn from multiple land use status, including approximately 9.2 million acres (excludes Department of Defense and Indian Lands) in Arizona. Recent proposed legislation designed to withdraw an additional 2.6 million acres of public lands from multiple use status in Arizona include: the Southern Arizona Public Lands Protection Act of 2013 (H.R. 1183), Great Bend of the Gila National Monument Establishment Act (H.R. 1348), Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act of 2013 (H.R. 1350) and Arizona Sonoran Desert Heritage Act of 2013 (H.R. 1799). All of these bills have one thing in common. They will permanently halt all exploration, mineral development and mining activities on these public lands.

In the past, one of the criteria used to evaluate an area's suitability to be withdrawn from multiple use status was a detailed assessment of its mineral potential. These assessments are no longer performed, apparently because they are viewed as impediments by those who support the withdrawal of our public lands from multiple use status. Even worse, other areas have been specifically targeted for mineral withdrawal because they are known to contain proven mineral resources.



David F. Briggs at the Silver Bell mining district, where little concern for the area's mineral potential was given to the decision in creating the Ironwood Forest National Monument in June 2000.

How have these policies negatively impacted our economic and national security? These policies have reduced our nation's ability to supply the minerals we require to insure our national security and to maintain and improve our infrastructure and standard of living. This has resulted in our increased dependence on foreign sources for raw materials, which has not only contributed to our nation's large trade deficits, but has also left our national security needs vulnerable to decisions made by foreign governments.

The withdrawal of ever increasing tracts of our public lands from mineral entry throughout the west has made it more difficult to attract the investment capital required to find and develop the natural resources necessary to fulfill the needs of present and future generations of Americans. The resulting loss of significant opportunities for economic development has also eroded the scientific and technological skills we require to remain competitive on the world market and impaired our ability to respond to threats to our national security.

Disclaimer: David F. Briggs is a resident of Pima county and a geologist, who has worked in the mining industry for more than 35 years.

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