

Pahrump Office
Nye County Government Center
2100 E. Walt Williams Drive
Suite 100
Pahrump, NV 89048
Phone (775) 751-7075
Fax (775) 751-7093



**Board of County
Commissioners**
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah Office
Nye County Courthouse
William P. Beko Justice Facility
PO Box 153
Tonopah, NV 89049
Phone (775) 482-8192
Fax (775) 482-8198

June 4, 2024

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Mr. Jon Raby
Nevada State Director
Bureau of Land Management
BLM Nevada State Office
1340 Financial Blvd.
Reno, NV 89502

Subject: Letter of support, endorsing the Amargosa Conservancy and its partners proposed Amargosa Valley Mineral Withdrawal boundary map as an appropriate area to be analyzed as part of an Administrative Mineral Withdrawal process to be initiated and executed by the Department of the Interior.

Dear Mr. Jon Raby,

This action is in keeping with the priorities of the county, specifically as executed through the Nye County Water District (NCWD). NCWD was formed to develop sustainable sources of water vital to long-term economic development, protection of the environment, and the well-being of the residents of Nye County. The NCWD service area includes all real property within the boundaries of Nye County, Nevada. One critical function of the district is to evaluate and mitigate the environmental impacts associated with resource use.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (the Refuge) is located within NV hydrographic Basin #230 in the southwestern portion of Nye County's First District, adjacent to the California/Nevada state line and to Death Valley National Park. The Refuge, established under the protection of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 1984, provides wetland habitat for more than 26 endemic species of plants, fish, amphibians, and other wildlife in the heart of the Amargosa Desert, a region known for extreme aridity and high desert temperatures. Within the Refuge is the Devils Hole: a disjunct portion of Death Valley National Park that provides habitat for the endangered Devils Hole pupfish. The Refuge and Devils Hole exist only due to the flow of both deep and shallow groundwater, originating from numerous upgradient basins and drainages within and beyond Nye County.

The Refuge and nearby Death Valley National Park act as significant draws for tourists from around the world seeking recreational opportunities. The flow of nearly 1.8 million visitors into Death Valley National Park contributes to the economies of communities such as Pahrump, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and several others.

Amargosa Valley Mineral Withdrawal

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Several recent proposals to conduct exploratory drilling operations near the Refuge and the township of Amargosa Valley indicate growing interest in mining and other extractive activities in this portion of Nye County. While Nye County is supportive of mining as a significant source of economic development in the county and in the state of Nevada, the risks involved in mining in this sensitive hydrological region outweigh potential benefits. Of greatest concern are both the acute impacts of drilling, open-pit excavation, and dewatering practices near the Refuge and Amargosa Valley, as well as the cumulative impact to groundwater resources resulting from large-scale development on public lands in this sensitive region. Disruption of hydrological flows into the Refuge risks significant imperilment of numerous sensitive and listed species protected by both the state of Nevada and the federal government. Additionally, mining activities in close proximity to the townships of Amargosa Valley, Crystal, and Johnnie risk negatively impacting domestic and commercial water rights holders who depend on these groundwater resources for their survival and economic opportunities.

These concerns have culminated in a desire put forth by a diverse coalition of local governments, Tribes, and nonprofit partners living and working in the Amargosa region for the managing agencies to withdraw a defined area of public lands surrounding the Refuge from new mineral entry in an effort to enhance protections for critical groundwater resources. The need for this action has been formally supported in recent months by the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, in a previous letter from the Nye County Board of County Commissioners, Amargosa Valley Town Board, Beatty Town Advisory Board, and numerous other entities. This action, executed through the authority of the Secretary of the Interior, would achieve a temporary withdrawal of public lands for up to 20 years from new mineral entry in a defined area, with valid pre-existing mineral rights and operations retained.

To inform a mineral withdrawal boundary area, The Nature Conservancy Nevada Chapter has commissioned a hydrological analysis of Basin #230, which indicates significant potential for impacts to the Refuge and these communities resulting from mining activities on surrounding public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Through use of the U.S.G.S. Death Valley Regional Numerical Flow Model (DV3) – a flow model adopted by the Nevada State Engineer under Order 1330 for management of groundwater pumping applications in Basin #230 – researchers were able to approximate the scale and scope of impacts that could occur if proposed drilling and mining activities requiring dewatering as part of their operations were to be permitted near the Refuge.

The preliminary results of this study indicate significant, far-ranging, and conceivably catastrophic impacts to groundwater-dependent resources in the region resulting from dewatering activities required by mining projects, with springs and wetlands within the Refuge suffering groundwater declines of between 2 and 30 feet in some scenarios. Due to high hydrological connectivity and transmissivity in this area, the DV3 model illustrates potential groundwater declines across tens of square miles, which could have significant impacts on water rights holders in Basin #230.

Amargosa Valley Mineral Withdrawal

June 4th, 2024

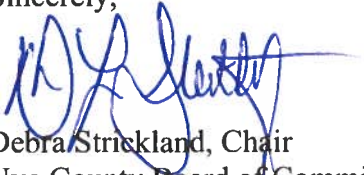
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We believe that the withdrawal area proposed by Amargosa Conservancy and formally supported by the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, the Amargosa Valley Town Board, Beatty Town Advisory Board, and numerous nonprofit partners is necessary to protect this natural resource and underground basin, and it should be analyzed as part of the National Environmental Policy Act process. This action is in keeping with the mission of NCWD and is necessary to secure adequate safeguards for the groundwater relied upon both by the Refuge and by the local communities of Amargosa Valley, Crystal, and Johnnie in Nevada, and by multiple downstream communities in California.

We urge the Secretary of the Interior to direct the relevant managing agencies to expeditiously initiate an Administrative Mineral Withdrawal procedure, and to work with Congress and the constituents of Nye County and the Death Valley/Amargosa region throughout the analysis and environmental review processes. Nye County looks forward to providing input during this process to ensure a mineral withdrawal action aligns with the policies and priorities of the county as well as its constituent government entities, commercial operations, and residents.

Our board voted unanimously to approve this letter on the 4th day of June 2024.

Sincerely,



Debra Strickland, Chair
Nye County Board of Commissioners

CC:

The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator
333 Las Vegas Boulevard South
Suite 8016
Las Vegas, NV 89101

The Honorable Jacky Rosen
United States Senator
333 Las Vegas Boulevard South
Suite 8203
Las Vegas, NV 89101

The Honorable Steven Horsford
United States Representative
2250 N Las Vegas Blvd
Suite 500
North Las Vegas, NV 89030

The Honorable Susie Lee
United States Representative
7785 W Sahara Ave
Suite 203
Las Vegas, NV 89117

TOWN OF AMARGOSA VALLEY
1640 E AMARGOSA FARM ROAD
AMARGOSA VALLEY, NV 89020
town@townofamargosa.com

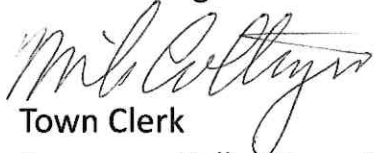
MINERAL WITHDRAWL FOR ASH MEADOWS

Mr. Mason Voehl
Executive Director
Amargosa Conservancy

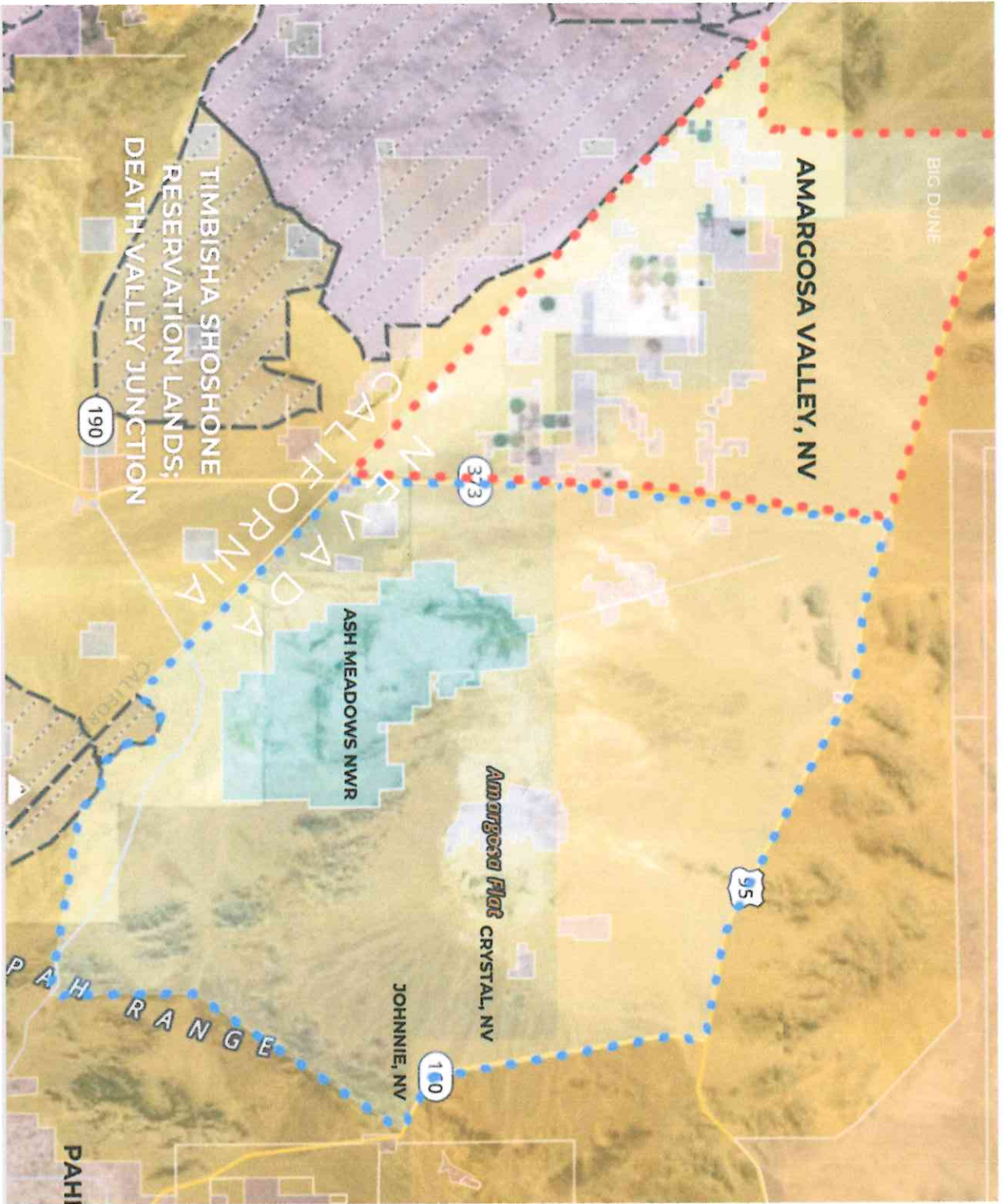
Mr. Voehl

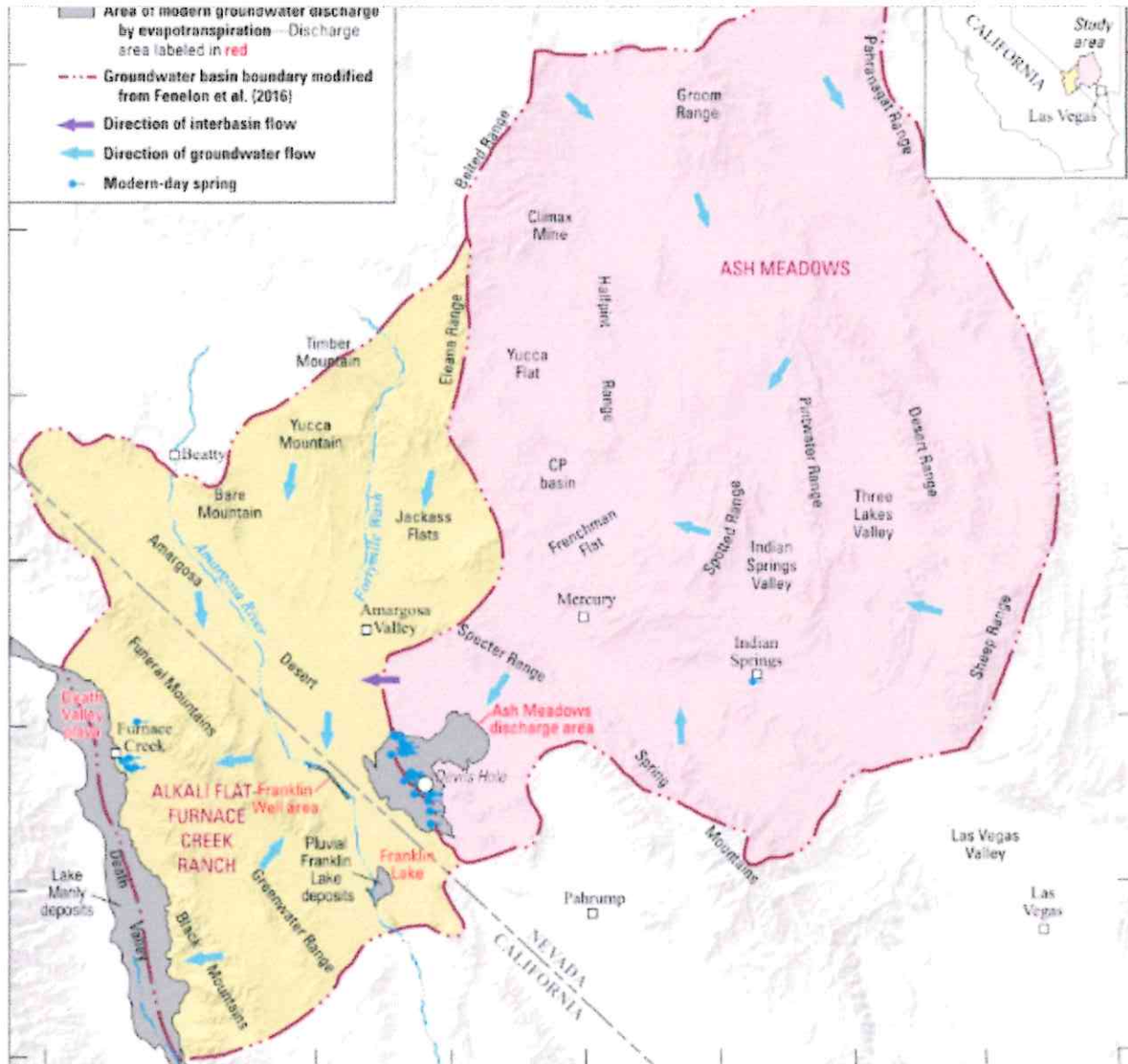
The Amargosa Valley Town Board passed an agenda item at its monthly meeting on April 25, 2024 supporting the proposed Mineral Withdrawl for the Ash Meadows Preserve. The Town Board voted 4 yes and 0 nay. The Vote supported the conceptual map that was presented. A Copy of the map is included with this letter. The Amargosa Valley Town Board feels that the Ash Meadows Preserve is a valuable resource and should be protected.

Mike Cottingim



Town Clerk
Amargosa Valley Town Board
April 26, 2024





Based from U.S. Geological Survey digital data, 1:100,000. Modified from U.S. Geological Survey, Late 1990s.

Beatty Town Advisory Board
PO Box 837
Beatty, Nevada 89003
775-553-2050



Senator Cortez-Masto

Sent via email: zach_zargoza@cortezmasto.senate.gov

May 10, 2024

Greetings Senator Cortez-Masto,

In November of 2023 The Beatty Town Advisory Board supported the Amargosa Conservancy's pursuit of an Administrative or Congressional Mineral Withdrawal of the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge.

We now call upon you, as our representatives, to take action to protect the Ash Meadows Refuge located in the Amargosa Valley in Nevada by adopting the proposed Ash Meadows Mineral withdrawal boundary presented to you by the Amargosa Conservancy as the area of analysis for an Administrative Mineral Withdrawal.

In 1972, The United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife Division of Realty published a Reconnaissance Appraisal Report of a "Proposed Desert Pupfish Reserve" in Nye County, Nevada and Inyo County, California, which would in 1984 be designated as Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. In this report, it was stated that three unique desert pupfishes had become extinct and more could be lost if their habitats were not saved and protected. In this same report the acquisition of roughly 168,000 acres by purchase, withdrawal or transfer was proposed. The recommended area would include principal habitats and enough of the underground basin to give some assurance the springs would continue.

We believe that the total withdrawal area proposed by Amargosa Conservancy and supported by the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe and numerous nonprofit partners is in keeping with the 1972 recommendation to protect this natural resource and underground basin, and it should be adopted.

Our concerns about water drawdown and recovery are valid. There are preliminary studies including 50-year and 100- year simulations that show continued growth in the cone of depression. The example drawdown at Devil's Hole were 23 feet and 30 feet for the 50-year and 100-year simulations, respectively. We cannot consider allowing any type of activity that could create or cause this situation.

In July of 2023 the BLM rescinded the approval of Rover Metals Let's Go Lithium Project 1.0 and put the requirement for plan a of operations draft in place and stated that NEPA must be conducted. In response, Rover Metals modified the project plan by reducing the number of boreholes along the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge. The new modified project is known by us as the Let's Go Lithium Project 2.0.

Beatty Town Advisory Board
PO Box 837
Beatty, Nevada 89003
775-553-2050



Projects like the Rover Critical Minerals' Let's Go Lithium Project, 2.0 which, according to Rover Metals will have 21 boreholes up to 150ft in depth or until groundwater is encountered cannot be allowed in this area. It is clear for all to see that Ash Meadows is a critical habitat and the groundwater basin cannot be placed at risk by the drilling of boreholes. We cannot rely on common sense and environmental concern to govern companies. As stated by Rover Critical Minerals' CEO Judson Cutler, they have doubled down on their pivot into critical minerals and remain resolute in their focus on advancing the Let's Go Lithium project in the Amargosa Valley of Nevada.

The Secretary of the Interior and or Congress must act to protect Ash Meadows, a recognized RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance, known as the Galapagos of the Desert which is home to at least 26 endemic species: species that live nowhere else in the world. Protecting the Amargosa Basin by adopting the proposed map and enacting a mineral withdrawal will protect a Basin that is home to people in Beatty, Pahrump, Crystal, and Amargosa Valley in Nevada and Furnace Creek, Shoshone, Tecopa, and Charleston View in California.

The adoption of the proposed map as the area of analysis for a mineral withdrawal will help to protect critical habitat for endemic and endangered species and protect a critical resource to health and wellbeing of the residents living within the Amargosa Basin.

Please take action now to protect us, your constituents, our homes, and the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Erika Gerling,
Beatty Town Advisory Board Chair

cc: B. Jabbour; Nye County Board of Commissioners Chair, M. Labadie; Nye County Natural Resources Office Director, T. Sutton; Nye County Manager, T. Bolling; Nye County Public Works Director, G. Hafen; NV Assemblyman, J. Rosen; US Senator, S. Horsford; US Representative, J. Raby; NV BLM State Director, BLM Southern Nevada District Office, N. Pay; BLM PFO Manager, M. Reynolds; Death Valley National Park Superintendent, M. Voehl; Amargosa Conservancy Executive Director