

NEVADA VIEWS: No more ghost towns in Nye County



Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is seen in the Amargosa Valley of southern Nye County, on Thursday, June 29, 2023. Canada-based Rover Metals proposes drilling up to 30 boreholes 250-300 feet deep to explore for lithium in an area adjacent to...

Bruce Jabbour Special to the Review-Journal



March 16, 2024 - 9:01 pm

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There is a fundamental truth that everyone who lives in dry places must abide by: Our water is our future. In my position, I live and work in full recognition of the reality that all life and prosperity in these desert lands depends on how water, as our most precious resource, is managed and protected.

It is easy to fall prey to the notion that living things could not possibly thrive in a place such as Nye County given its location in one of the warmest and driest regions on the North American continent. But those who live here or spend time exploring this area know better.

Nye County is home to an incredible abundance of life in many forms. Communities in the county such as Tonopah, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, Crystal, Pahrump, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Belmont, Gabbs, Yumba, Duckwater, Current, Sunnyside and Railroad Valley are some of the most unique and storied communities in our state. Residents and tourists alike are attracted to these rural areas and to their surrounding lands because of the sense of true freedom, solitude and quietness they offer.

Nye County is also where the Amargosa River begins. Fed by groundwater that flows between several interconnected basins, the Amargosa provides a substantial portion of the county with an essential resource. In the middle of the Amargosa Desert is Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, a wetland oasis near the town of Amargosa Valley and Death Valley National Park. The refuge is known around Nevada and around the world due to the remarkably rare species of wildlife that live only within its borders.

The communities in this basin and Ash Meadows share in common one vitally important trait: They depend on water for their survival. That is why when I first came to learn of proposed mining activities near the wildlife refuge and the town of Amargosa Valley, I became deeply concerned. Though Nye County is strongly supportive of mining as the cornerstone of the state's economy, I and many others feel that mining activities such as those that have been proposed near the wildlife refuge in search of lithium and other rare metals pose too great a risk to water and therefore to life in this area to be allowed.

Frankly, frustration has been building in our communities for more than a decade regarding the potential impacts of renewable energy development on life here in Nye County. Areas of the county, including the Amargosa Desert and Pahrump Valley, have had a bull's-eye painted on them for industrial solar and other energy development projects.

We have already seen how just a handful of large-scale projects can change the quality of life in our communities as a result of the increased blowing dust and noise and the loss of unobstructed views that has come along with them.

But of gravest concern is what happens if projects are allowed to proceed that will consume or disrupt water that is relied upon by homes, businesses and special desert habitat areas such as those found within Ash Meadows. We in Nye County are eager to sit at the table with the federal managing agencies and our partners in the area to discuss sensible solutions and best practices for determining where these kinds of projects are appropriate, and where they are not. We believe our perspective as residents of this special landscape can be instrumental in guiding responsible land use and extraction. We feel we must do everything in our power to ensure that no new ghost towns are created in Nye County as a result of the decisions made too hastily and without sufficient consideration and discussion today.

That is why we are calling on our federal land managers and leaders in Congress to work together and with us as residents of the community to develop sensible solutions to our energy issues. This starts with not allowing projects with the clear potential to affect groundwater needed by the communities and by places such as Ash Meadows to move forward. Actions need to be considered and taken with the aim of ensuring that life in this basin continues to have the water it needs to thrive well beyond our lifetimes. We look to those charged with the duty of managing these lands to

commit to that idea by saving our treasured landscapes such as Ash Meadows from the harms of exploratory mining on its bordering lands.

I call on our leaders not to let any more towns become ghost towns on their watch.

Bruce Jabbour, a Republican, represents District 1 on the Nye County Commission.

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SUSTAINABILITY


COMMENTARY

Ash Meadows should be cared for, cherished, and protected from mining

| ERIKA GERLING

MARCH 11, 2024 6:00 AM



 Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. (Photo courtesy of Patrick Donnelly/Center for Biological Diversity)

Over the past few years, I've thought a lot about how I think and feel about wild places, our public lands, and the rules, regulations, and agencies that govern them. As a long-time resident of Beatty, Nevada near the headwaters of the Amargosa River, one such wild place that I care deeply about is Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.

Ash Meadows is a wetland oasis on the shoulder of Death Valley National Park. The springs, seeps, and wetland habitat areas found in Ash Meadows are fed by the flowing ancient groundwater of the Amargosa River: the same river that provides me with the water I drink and use every day. Thousands of people from around the world come to this area to experience the unique beauty of Ash Meadows, the Amargosa River, and Death Valley: stunning irreplaceable landscapes just outside our front door.

When I became aware of an exploratory drilling project on the doorstep of Ash Meadows proposed by a Canadian company called Rover Metals, my immediate reaction was to think, “how could this happen?” No one but this mining company thinks it’s a good idea. The Bureau of Land Management rescinded their approval of the project last summer after our community and many others raised our voices, urging them not to put such an incredibly delicate ecosystem like Ash Meadows at risk.

The fact that this company came even close to drilling holes feet away from springs in Ash Meadows – and that they and other mining companies continue to propose projects on its borders – should be a wake up call to everyone who cares about this special place.

I first went to Ash Meadows over 40 years ago. It had not yet been designated as a refuge at that time. I remember how absolutely beautiful it was, how quiet it was save for the sounds of birds, wildlife, and flowing water. There weren’t many other people around back then, and it seemed we were in this oasis that was just for us, separate from the rest of the world. It could have been another world, with its bright blue waters, clear blue sky, and seemingly total isolation.

Like many of the people who live in this remote corner of Nevada, I feel an emotional attachment to Ash Meadows. Forty years or more ago, I wasn’t aware of how special this place was, only that it was a fun place to spend a hot afternoon. Now I understand the significance of this one-of-a-kind place. I don’t think I can find enough adjectives to convey just what Ash Meadows means to me, or to express my concern at how mining and exploratory drilling could affect this sensitive oasis.

There are at least 26 species of plants, fish, amphibians, and other wildlife that are found at Ash Meadows and nowhere else on the planet. Let me say that again: nowhere else on the planet! That alone should inform any company, agency, or persons about how to

treat this place. We should treat it with kid gloves, not drill rigs and regulations that don't properly protect it.

This sentiment is shared by many residents in Beatty and beyond. We care deeply about Ash Meadows because we live here. We play and work here. We enjoy and cherish what we have. We don't ask for much. We are asking that common sense prevail and our leaders in our federal lands agencies and in Congress take urgent action to protect Ash Meadows from the impacts of mining on its borders.

Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge should be cared for and cherished. We should learn from the Devils Hole pupfish, found only there, in one spring, on one shelf in that spring, how they have survived. We might need to know.



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ERIKA GERLING

Erika Gerling is a long-time Beatty resident and serves on the Beatty Town Advisory Board.

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The **NEVADA** INDEPENDENT**OPINION: Fairbanks Spring: A family history under threat**

Brian Brown April 24th, 2024 at 2:00 AM

Opinion



Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge on Dec. 10, 2023. (Amy Alonzo/The Nevada Independent)

As someone who has built a life along the Amargosa River and a descendant of one of the Mojave Desert's most fascinating pioneers, I'm proud and lucky to be able to visit places that have helped shape my family history. Now, that history is under attack due to shortsighted and potentially devastating proposed mining projects upstream.

When Ralph Fairbanks — who was called “Dad” by those who met him — arrived in Las Vegas in 1903, he was a teamster. After his job helping to build the railroad grade with his mules and scrapers ended, he bought a little land and set up a livery stable to begin freighting from the humble little railroad siding to the boomtowns farther north: Tonopah, Goldfield and Rhyolite. He shrewdly realized that Las Vegas was never going to amount to anything (forgive the tongue in cheek) and set out for the mining fields that were more of a hotbed for the kind of action and opportunity he craved.

He sold out in Vegas and headed north, eventually ending up at the spring in what is now [Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Nevada that bears his name: Fairbanks Spring. He had a wife and eight children in tow, and he did anything possible to make a living. He carried people and freight from the Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad to the boomtown of Greenwater, always stopping by Fairbanks Spring to rent them a tent for the night, sell them supplies and engage in a friendly game of poker.

He then moved his operation to Greenwater, and when it went bust, he started the town of Shoshone, a water stop on the new Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad. In 1927, in his 70s, he moved 50 miles south and started the town of Baker, acquiring 160 acres where the first paved road across the Mojave Desert would intersect with the railroad. He flourished, and to this day, his descendants still populate many corners

of the Mojave Desert. He was a rough character but right for the times and the location, and he figured out how to make a living in one of the harshest environments on the planet.

Perhaps he was an obvious parallel to the unique species of flora and fauna at Ash Meadows that have also figured out how to flourish there, as have the native peoples for millennia. And now, we are being asked to potentially sacrifice this wonderful little bit of American history for ... phone batteries? Electric cars?

A junior mining industry player from Canada, Rover Critical Minerals, has [proposed a project](#) to drill multiple boreholes far too close to Fairbanks Spring for virtually everyone's comfort but theirs. If this project is allowed to proceed, the spring and all the organisms that depend upon it are under a real threat.

Of course, the mining company claims to only be interested in sampling these lands for mineral potential. However, if Rover Critical Minerals is then able to successfully develop and sell a commercial lithium mining claim there, I believe the entire [Ash Meadows ecosystem](#) will be in real peril. That the federal agencies whose stated mission is the recovery of [endangered and endemic species](#) would even consider permitting a project that presents such a risk is absurd on its face. But, that's the possible future we are facing in this rarest of places: desert wetlands that support 26 species of fish, plants, amphibians and other wildlife that only live there.

It is often said that history is important because we can't know where we are going unless we know where we have been. Fairbanks Spring is important to me, as I have a familial connection to it. I hope that my son, Travis Fairbanks Brown, and his children, and theirs, will also be able to stand by those aqua-blue waters and imagine their ancestors standing there more than a century ago. It is up to all of us who care about history and the astonishing beauty and vitality of the natural world to fight this good fight. This one is a must-win.

I call upon those in power who have been charged with the caretaking of these lands to take urgent actions to protect Ash Meadows from these harms, not just for the sake of my family, but for all the families of life that deserve a chance to love this desert wetland as I do. This is a chance for our leaders to become a part of the story of Ash Meadows and Fairbanks Spring, to take their place alongside generations of humans who have enjoyed its gifts and passed them onward to their kin. I sure hope they take it before the chance is gone for good.

Brian Brown is a fourth generation Mojave Desert resident and the owner-operator of China Ranch, a date farm within the Amargosa region. He has been active in the efforts to preserve the unique ecological values of the Amargosa region for the last few decades.

The Nevada Independent *welcomes informed, cogent rebuttals to opinion pieces such as this. Send them to submissions@thenvindy.com.*

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GUEST COLUMN:

Ash Meadows must once again be defended from mining

By Barbara Kelley

Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2024 | 2 a.m.

In the desert east of Death Valley, in the hottest and driest corner of the United States, lies a miracle in the form of water.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is 24,000 acres of impressive springs, seeps and wetlands, home to 26 endemic species of fish, plants and invertebrates that live nowhere else on Earth. Twelve of these lifeforms are endangered or threatened with extinction, including the world's most endangered fish, the Devils Hole pupfish.

Over 275 species of resident and migratory birds, along with several mammal species, also depend on this oasis for survival.

This valley is sacred to the Indigenous Nuwu and Newe peoples, and the region supports the livelihoods of 40,000 people. This striking refuge, a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance, is under dire threat by proposed mining.

Survival in Ash Meadows has been ominously challenged before. In 1976, excessive groundwater pumping was curtailed by a Supreme Court decision, saving the Devils Hole pupfish from extinction. Then, in 1980, Ash Meadows was under immediate threat of likely total elimination by different water-depleting menace: the proposed development of a new metropolis on top of this desert oasis.

I worked with biologists to increase awareness of the urgency of this danger, and in 1984 Congress established Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, a decision that for the past 40 years has ensured that these lifeforms survive and thrive.

The modern threat is industrial mining operations, perilously close to the refuge boundary. Rover Metals, a Canadian company, has applied to drill 21 exploratory boreholes a few thousand feet from the northernmost life-sustaining water source, Fairbanks Spring.

Current and historical hydrologic studies, as well as past history of groundwater pumping, portend probable dire impacts to essential groundwater and surface spring flows on the refuge. Two endangered species of fish live in Fairbanks Spring and could disappear forever should drilling and mining operations be allowed to occur in this sensitive area.

These exploratory drilling actions are prerequisite to large-scale open pit mining, which would threaten the lifeforms in the valley, including the human residents who depend on it for their survival.

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A key first step in the current struggle is to establish a mineral withdrawal for land surrounding the refuge. A mineral withdrawal would prevent new mining claims from being filed in a defined area around the refuge as a means of better safeguarding cultural, biological and recreational resources in abundance at Ash Meadows.

To be clear, a mineral withdrawal would not save Ash Meadows from all harm, or even all mining projects already in development in the region. But a withdrawal would be a meaningful step toward broader permanent protection.

Local Amargosa Valley residents, as well as local and Nye County governing boards, have sent letters to members of Congress and the Department of the Interior in support of the mineral withdrawal. Future steps would involve crucial public input as the Bureau of Land Management considers Rover Metals' mining proposal but continued public support is essential to successfully protecting this area.

You can help protect the "Galapagos of the Desert" by signing the petition for a mineral withdrawal and by signing up for further information as the mining proposal process continues. More information can be found at amargosaconservancy.org/news-blog/the-fight-to-save-ash-meadows.

Forty years ago, I thought, "We did it. We're done. Ash Meadows is safe and will endure." But so long as mining threatens groundwater in the region, the refuge remains at great peril. The work is not yet finished.

It's very sobering, returning to the fray after 40 years. The lesson is that we need enduring effort, lasting commitment and constant vigilance. We need voices raised in defense of Ash Meadows once again.

This is an important issue, a crucial struggle. Visit the refuge to see for yourself the magic, the miracle of flowing springs, quiet seeps, swaths of wetlands, darting fish and so much more: the magic of water in the desert.

Barbara Kelley is a retired educator living in Bishop, Calif. Among many other educational and environmental pursuits, she played an instrumental part in the establishment of Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in the early 1980s.



GOVERNMENT

SUSTAINABILITY

Nye County Commission rebukes lithium mining, solar development

BY: **JENIFFER SOLIS** - JANUARY 9, 2024 6:17 AM

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in the Amargosa Valley. (Getty Images)

Growing industrial development in Nye County is facing pushback after public opposition to projects residents fear may harm the county's limited water resources.

Last week, the Nye County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve letters opposing mining activities near the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and solar developments within one of the most over-appropriated basins in the state.

Nevada's vast public lands have become a magnet for energy developers and mining companies looking to cash in on the clean energy transition.

Nye County is now at the center of those interests after [thousands of acres](#) in Nevada's Amargosa desert was leased for solar development last year, resulting in the highest-yielding onshore renewable energy auction in Bureau of Land Management history.

The county is also gaining interest from lithium mining companies after high-grade lithium was detected near the Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, a critical wetland habitat that supports a dozen endangered and threatened species.

In the letter opposing proposed mining activities near the refuge, the county called on the Department of the Interior and Congress to analyze and pursue a mineral withdrawal for public lands in the sensitive area.

Permanently withdrawing the area from mining “will provide long-term protection and certainty of the Refuge’s status. It will also demonstrate our Federal Leadership’s commitment to the environment by hearing and acting on their constituents’ concerns,” wrote chair of the Nye County Board of Commissioners, Bruce Jabbour, [in the letter](#).

The county argued that allowing exploratory drilling and other mining activities near the ecologically sensitive refuge could “alter crucial groundwater flows with the risk of dewatering, causing irretrievable damage to the aquifer.”

Canada-based mining company Rover Metals [submitted a new plan](#) of operations for an exploratory drilling project near Ash Meadows last month, prompting the county to petition the federal government for stronger protections.

Federal land managers initially approved the company’s plan last year for a lithium exploration project less than a mile from the refuge before pulling their approval after [strong public opposition and litigation](#) to halt the project until a more detailed plan could be developed and reviewed.

Officials from the nearby towns within Nye County of Beatty and Amargosa Valley also submitted letters supporting the need for lands bordering Ash Meadows to be withdrawn from mining out of concern for impacts to groundwater.

“Some places are simply too important to risk losing and need to be taken off the table when it comes to mining,” said Mason Voehl, executive director at the Amargosa Conservancy, who joined the

initial lawsuit against the project. “The communities of Nye County have made it clear that Ash Meadows is absolutely one of them. We will do whatever it takes to see to it that Ash Meadows flourishes for generations to come.”

Solar development and water supply

The Nye County Board of Commissioners also unanimously approved a letter last week asking Clark County to deny or re-site solar development applications located along the Nye County border near Pahrump.

Nye County has no authority regarding solar development in Clark County, however, the Nye officials argued there “is significant concern that cumulative solar development within the basin on land in Clark County will adversely impact the Pahrump region’s water supply.”

Specifically, the county noted their concern over large-scale solar development in a basin known as “the Pahrump Hydrographic Basin 162,” one of the most over-appropriated basins in Nevada with the highest density of domestic wells of any basin in the state.

Pahrump, Nye County’s most populous town, has been plagued by declining groundwater levels with domestic well failures increasing annually, according to county officials. Nye County officials said they believe cumulative solar development in the basin would only worsen the county’s water woes.

“I don’t want to be in a position where Clark County might look at Nye County over the hill and say ‘oh, it can just go out there,’” said Nye County Commissioner Ron Boskovich during the vote.

In the letter, the Nye County Board of Commissioners acknowledged Nevada’s position as a primary location for clean energy development in order to achieve a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035 and net zero emissions by 2050.

County officials said they support the development of renewable energy facilities in Nye County, however, urged Clark County to consider the interests of Nye County residents.

The county assured that it is currently developing a plan to identify ideal locations for solar development within the county and “recognizes the significant impacts to our natural resources and County communities.”

“Denying applications and offering re-siting of renewable energy facilities will greatly increase our quality of life by preserving our limited and precious resources,” wrote Jabbour, the county commission chair, [in the letter](#).

Clark County did not respond to questions about the letter or their role in approving the solar development in question.



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JENIFFER SOLIS



Jeniffer was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada where she attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas before graduating in 2017 with a B.A in Journalism and Media Studies.

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POLICY, POLITICS AND COMMENTARY

DEMOCRACY TOOLKIT



'Without water, you can't live here': Mining claims like redeclaration of war for some



Mason Voehl, executive director of the Amargosa Conservancy, unfurls one of hundreds of mining claims staked by Rover Critical Minerals on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, in Amargosa Valley. (L.E. Baskow/Las Vegas Review-Journal) @Left_Eye_Images

By [Alan Halaly](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal



May 16, 2024 - 1:14 pm

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AMARGOSA VALLEY — Across the street from Judi Faber's quaint one-story house in Amargosa Valley is a wooden stick. Initially, the 77-year-old retiree didn't think much of it.

But inside the plastic container tied to the plank is a folded-up paper — a foretelling note from a mining company claiming its stake to the minerals that may lie in the ground near her property. At best, it signals the company could begin exploratory drilling to assess the area for minerals. At worst, she could one day live next to an open-pit mine.

“Would they like a mine in their backyard?” Faber said. “Would they like it in their children’s yard? If they cared about the people, they would move somewhere else.”

Since the end of April, Rover Critical Minerals has hammered nearly 400 sticks marking its territory in the small town of Amargosa Valley, representing about 8,000 acres of mining claims right up to the border of California. And those are just the ones environmentalists have found so far. With no notification of residents required and a slow process to report new claims online, keeping tabs on new claims can be tricky.

Under the General Mining Act of 1872, the company is able to establish ownership on public land for a mere \$165 per 20-acre parcel. Miners also can disturb up to 5 acres in each parcel without going through a federal environmental review, drilling holes in the sand that advocates say could alter the flow of groundwater.

That could be bad news for Faber, one of the town’s some 1,000 residents who rely on a domestic well to pump water from the ground to drink, shower, cook and irrigate their lawns.

Faber says her well is in poor shape already. Drilling a new, deeper one to reach a lower water table could cost upward of \$20,000, she said.

“Without the well, you don’t survive,” Faber said. “Let’s face it: Without water, you can’t live here.”

Water woes already there for well owners

Faber’s not the only one who’s having trouble. Town board chair Carolyn Allen said there are some residents who have spoken at meetings with wells that draw up only air or sand, but no water.

Allen attributes much of the town’s current water issues to Ponderosa Dairies, a large cattle grazing operation in the middle of town that has sprawling, green fields.

Activists say the dairy is the largest user of water of the Amargosa River, a small system that flows from Beatty into Death Valley National Park in California.

Drilling that's exploratory or a new mine down the line could be devastating for rural residents, Allen said.

"This basin has been over-appropriated and over-pumped for many, many years," she said. "Nobody's really paying attention to it."

Ed Goedhart, the manager of Ponderosa Dairies and a former Nevada assemblyman, said he doesn't find Rover's new claims to be much of a threat because the company's lack of capital makes it unlikely a mine would be approved.

The dairy, which is the only one left in Southern Nevada, provides an essential service by reducing the time it takes for milk products to hit grocery shelves in Las Vegas, said Goedhart, who serves as vice chair of Nye County's Water District Governing Board.

Goedhart acknowledges that Ponderosa Dairies owns a large share of the rights to draw groundwater in Amargosa Valley.

But even if the dairy closed — which he predicted would happen in the near future — it would sell off its water rights to the highest bidder, potentially widening the strain on the basin as well as the area of most-affected well owners.

"Those points of divergence are going to be scattered all over hundreds and hundreds of square miles," Goedhart said. "Localized drawdown will recover, but there'll be new areas of localized drawdown scattered throughout the basin."

Battle brews with environmentalists

Rover Critical Minerals, based in Canada, quietly proposed a lithium mine last year within Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge.

The refuge is a delicate and protected Nye County area with several endangered species like the Devils Hole pupfish, the rarest fish in the world.

After pushback from Amargosa Valley residents and a lawsuit from environmental groups, the Bureau of Land Management revoked approval in July of exploratory drilling up to 300 feet deep near vulnerable springs in the refuge.

In a recent statement, the company said it has engaged a top environmental consulting firm “to ensure the project does not contribute to declining groundwater levels in Ash Meadows.”

It has moved its claim boundaries 4 miles to the west based off a recommendation from the firm, and its new area in Amargosa Valley is “far above the groundwater,” the mining company said. Its proposed mining plan may become public in the coming months.

The company is taking steps to finance the project and plans to move forward with drilling, according to a statement released Wednesday.

Company managers “feel confident that exploration drilling can be achieved in the area, with less than five acres of planned disturbance,” CEO Judson Culter said in the statement.

The lawsuit against the Ash Meadows mine was a first for the Amargosa Conservancy, a nonprofit that has stayed out of the courtroom since its founding in 2004.

Because of the endangered species within the refuge, there was a clear connection between drilling and how that would affect those species’ habitat. Though Amargosa Valley lies within the same hydrological basin as Ash Meadows, making the case to cease operations for endangered species is a further stretch this time because of distance.

Amargosa Conservancy executive director Mason Voehl spent much of the past week taking stock of the extent of Rover’s claims, physically driving around the town and hiking into desert brush to find as many wooden stakes as possible. In some way, what’s happened feels like a redeclaration of war, he said.

“This is a major escalation in what’s already been a very contentious fight over the future of this valley,” Voehl said.

Two paths forward: Congress or the Interior Department

The best chance environmental groups have right now is to have issued what’s called a “mineral withdrawal,” which could suspend all mineral claims if a compelling case is made.

There are two ways to achieve one: Congress can introduce legislation to protect the area, or a land management agency can petition Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland, who has the power to initiate an environmental review if need is evident.

Even though U.S. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Las Vegas, recently toured Ash Meadows and testified in front of Haaland about mining threats in the refuge, Voehl said he hopes to work on a petition to Haaland. Right now, he and Allen hope to garner the support of the Nye County Commission to demonstrate greater need.

With so much at stake in the Amargosa Desert, Voehl believes whatever happens will be telling for future land conflicts.

“This is going to send a signal across the West of how this is going to play out across sensitive landscapes writ large,” he said.

In the meantime, residents are left to wonder if exploratory drilling will exacerbate Amargosa Valley’s existing water issues.

Harv Dykstra, who saw surveyors install a wooden stake a few hundred feet from his home, said he hasn’t had any problem with the well on his property. But he fears that a mine could change that and said he’s disillusioned by the lack of community engagement from Rover.

“They have an obligation to educate us as to what they’re doing and how it’s going to impact us,” Dykstra said.

Contact Alan Halaly at ahalaly@reviewjournal.com. Follow [@AlanHalaly](https://twitter.com/AlanHalaly) on X.

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Here's what Nye County just did in response to 'grave concerns' about water

Here's what Nye County just did in response to 'grave concerns' about water



One of hundreds of mining claims staked recently by Rover Critical Minerals, this one adjacent to the Longstreet Inn Casino property on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, in Amargosa Valley. (L.E. Baskow/Las Vegas Review-Journal) @Left_Eye_Images

By [Alan Halaly](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal



June 4, 2024 - 4:23 pm

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Updated June 5, 2024 - 9:05 am



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Presented by **NAQVI INJURY LAW**

The Nye County Commission expressed its reservations about mining claims around the town of Amargosa Valley on Tuesday, unanimously approving a letter of support for a petition that could ease residents' groundwater concerns.

A coalition of town governments, local residents, the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe and the nonprofit Amargosa Conservancy have been fighting against what could result in exploratory drilling by Rover Critical Minerals, a Canadian mining company.

The company [quietly staked its claims](#) to about 400 five-acre parcels near homes and local businesses in May — something that raised alarm bells about the groundwater on which residents and dozens of species rely.

Some community members saw the move as retaliation after the Bureau of Land Management [revoked the company's earlier permits](#) to conduct drilling around the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge following a lawsuit from the Amargosa Conservancy last year.

“In light of the community’s grave concerns over the future of their water security as well as potential impacts to wildlife and natural resources in the iconic landscapes of Ash Meadows, Death Valley and the Amargosa River, our coalition is seeking urgent action to protect wildlife and water rights holders in this corner of Nye County,” said Mason Voehl, executive director of the Amargosa Conservancy.

The mining company did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday but in past statements has downplayed any risk to local groundwater.

Interior secretary to decide

The petition involves a request for an administrative mineral withdrawal, which would halt any new mining claims from being established on federally owned land within the proposed boundaries. It wouldn't affect claims already made but could prevent exploratory drilling.

Either Congress or the interior secretary can initiate a federal environmental review that would determine whether a mineral withdrawal would be

necessary.

As of now, the coalition is seeking support from local governments like Nye County to encourage the Southern Nevada BLM office to petition Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to commence the review. So far, it has earned approval from the Nye County Water District Governing Board and the town boards of Beatty and Amargosa Valley.

A spokesperson from the Southern Nevada BLM office, which likely would be involved in petitioning Haaland, said the agency could not provide comment before publication.

Carolyn Allen, Amargosa Valley town board chair, told commissioners that any threat to domestic wells that pump groundwater could force people out of her town.

“If lithium mining became a reality at Ash Meadows, it would simply create another ghost town in Nevada,” she said.

Earlier in the day, Allen and Voehl spoke to the state Legislature’s standing natural resources committee about the topic.

Nye County Commissioner Bruce Jabbour, who represents Amargosa Valley, said the mineral withdrawal is critical to the future of Ash Meadows. Water should belong to residents, not corporations, he said.

“The people have the rights first before this or any other company wants to come in and drill,” Jabbour said.

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