

13 Dec 85

TO: Captain Donald Zona
Hq TAC/DEEV
Langley AFB, VA
23665-5001

Comments regarding Groom Mountain Range Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Mitigation #11

Early in 1984 the Air Force Illegally seized 89,000 acres of public land called the Groom Range. This act was legitmatized by H.R. 4932 and S. 2657 introduced 23 Feb 84 and 10 May 84 respectively. The Air Force used as its authority to occupy (seize) P.L. 98-485 approved 17 October 1984. All these dates are AFTER the seizure

In the blue pamphlet handed out to the public at the open meetings of 19, 20 & 22 Nov. 85 and in the DEIS, the Air Force rejects the mitigation to purchase private lands to expand Red Rock Recreation lands in Clark County as not related to withdrawal, estimated recreation loss or cost prohibitive. To begin, it is not the intent of this mitigation to expand anything. What this mitigation is trying to achieve is to avoid a visitor standing by the Visitors Center, after getting good information about the geology, flora etc. of the area, stepping outside the door and seeing a shopping center or another development. What we are looking for is a buffer zone.

If the Air Force would consider the mitigation in the context of the Santini-Burton (S-B) Bill, none of these rejections would be valid. The S-B Bill is essentially a two-step exchange. 1. The Air Force buys the Groom Range with the money placed in escrow. 2. Escrow to buy critical private Nevada lands. A good purchase could be those SUMMA Corp. lands near Red Rocks Recreation Area. This area being just outside Las Vegas, a major population center and a rapidly expanding one.

My question is why wasn't this mitigation considered in the context of the S-B Bill

Sincerely
Walter Barbush

December 30, 1985

Captain Donald Zona
HQ TAC/DEEV
Langley AFB, VA 23665-5001

Dear Captain Zona:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Air Force's DEIS for renewal of the Groom Mountain Range land withdrawal. I attended the public hearing at Clark County Community College, Las Vegas, in November to express my feelings. However, due to the limited time available to speakers there, I feel the need to amplify my brief statement now in writing.

There are a number of "small" flaws in the DEIS. For example:

1. On page 1-1 the first statement is that the Air Force proposes "to renew the withdrawal of 89,600 acres, more or less..." Given the seriousness of this issue, I believe you could be somewhat more specific than "more or less."

2. Page 3-27's first paragraph states that "The State Historical Preservation Office will be consulted." Why wasn't it already consulted? If you haven't gathered as much information as possible about the proposed area, how can you fully study the potential impacts?

3. On page 4-6, the second paragraph shows faulty logic in progressing from the statement that the Groom Mountain Range mineral properties are "owned by families or individuals who may not (emphasis provided) have the financial reserves required" to the statement that "Future mineral activity...is (emphasis provided)...dependent on the lease or sale of properties to major mining companies." Logically speaking, a possibility does not result in a definite outcome.

4. On page 4-16 you state that the cost for purchase of private land near Red Rocks would be "from approximately \$4,000,000 to \$25,000,000" but you repeatedly refer orally and even in other places of the document to a cost "upwards of \$25 million." This is misrepresentation of the grossest kind.

Much more serious, however, is the entire attitude assumed by the Air Force throughout the document. As Congressman Reid stated, you seem to have treated the requests by citizens for compensation simply as an unrealistic "wish list." Your evaluation of the proposed mitigation measures is totally frivolous, and you dismiss almost all of them out of hand on extremely flimsy bases.

You fail to give any serious explanation for the reasons each of the mitigation measures is dismissed. On page 4-14 regarding potential mitigation no. 6, you state simply that "This mitigation measure is not recommended for implementation." At the briefing at the public comment meeting, you showed a chart supposedly summarizing the document. The chart stated that this measure was too expensive and that's why it was rejected. Your speaker who was conducting the hearing stated that it was rejected because it was not mitigation of a direct impact. It seems the real reason it was rejected is simply because you had decided to reject almost all mitigation measures. An EIS is supposed to provide a complete evaluation and explanation--yours certainly fails to do that, and we are left wondering why you rejected things. Your "logic" is supposed to be open for public review, and the EIS is clearly inadequate to allow that.

This issue of some mitigation measures being rejected because they are not mitigation of a direct impact was used often in your document--for example, to support rejection of Potential Mitigation No. 16, transfer of BLM land in Clark County for a Veterans Cemetery. Such an argument fails to consider the illegal nature of the Air Force's seizure of this land in the Groom Range and the fact that increasing military withdrawals of land in Nevada is greatly decreasing the public's access to "public lands." In such circumstances, the provision of additional land for public use is indeed "related to the withdrawal."

You repeatedly state in your document that certain mitigation measures are rejected because they are too costly. The final result of your DEIS is to recommend one mitigation measure at a cost of \$88,000--i.e. you want to retain control of the land you illegally seized and compensate the public at the rate of less than one dollar per acre. That certainly seems too cheap to any fairly thinking person!

Finally, you seem to have totally disregarded the impact of the seizure on the public's potential access to public land. You give figures of the usage Lincoln County residents make of the area and the potential impacts of Lincoln County growth (for example, see page 1-7 and 1-8). However, you dismiss any usage Clark County residents will make in the future. An EIS is to consider present and future impacts. It is clear that the population of Clark County will continue to grow. It is also clear that outdoor recreation is ever increasing in popularity. These two factors, especially in conjunction with each other, show that there clearly will be increased demand from Clark County in the future for recreational opportunities outside the County. Such opportunities are being curtailed by your retention of this land formerly open for public use. Yet you totally fail to consider this impact.

The only thing you seem truly concerned about in this document is "national security." Yet you completely fail to define the criteria for such needs. It is therefore impossible for a person to evaluate the various mitigation measures and the potential actions in terms of need. For example, perhaps the national security needs of the withdrawal can be met through withdrawal of a lesser area. We are all Americans and we are all concerned with national security. However, we cannot put national security up on a pedestal and say that everything else must bow before it. Again, as stated above, you must present all the relevant information in your EIS so that the environmental impact can truly be understood and evaluated. This clearly was not done, resulting in an inadequate and biased EIS that appears to have been written strictly to comply with Congress' order that you prepare an EIS--producing paperwork but not the information which was the whole point of the order. It certainly needs a lot of revision before the final EIS is issued!

Sincerely,

Chen Cunningham