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**RESIDENTS UNITE IN OPPOSITION TO MINING AT CONGLOMERATE MESA**

*Bureau of Land Management defies community consensus; gives the green light for gold exploration near Death Valley National Park*

Bishop, CA—May 18—The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently announced a decision to allow exploration for gold at Conglomerate Mesa, a remote and wild corner of Inyo County adjacent to Death Valley National Park. This decision endangers the area’s recreation- and tourism-based economy, delicate water supply, and uniquely important ecosystem and cultural resources. The decision also flies in the face of the community’s clear opposition to the project, which it expressed at the Inyo County Board of Supervisors meeting when the project was discussed.

Silver Standard Resources (SSR Mining, Inc.) proposes to drill 1,000 feet down into Conglomerate Mesa at seven locations to collect samples which will then be analyzed for their gold deposits. The company’s proposal provides that it will access the drill sites by helicopter in the next several months and haul water by truck from an unknown offsite location. If ultimately permitted, this activity will create dust and noise disturbance to visitors and wildlife as well as deplete scarce water sources.

“The ultimate objective of SSR Mining, Inc. is to create 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 deplete local water supplies,” said **Wendy Schneider, Executive Director of Friends of the Inyo**. “We are disappointed to see the approval of a project that is clearly in direct contradiction to public opinion. In the long term, the local economy will certainly suffer if this project goes forward.”

Last fall, the BLM conducted a comment period for the public to weigh in on the exploration proposal. The public overwhelmingly expressed grave concerns about the project. Other problems include that, in its environmental review, the BLM failed to identify or analyze the likely effects of a large-scale mining operation or the cumulative impacts to cultural resources, air quality, soil, groundwater, wildlife, and native plants. For the first time in recent history, under immense public

pressure, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors submitted a letter to the BLM taking a neutral position on the mining exploration.

"The Perdito exploration is located within an area that the BLM previously identified as being wild and undeveloped and providing opportunities for solitude and quiet recreation," said **Linda Castro, Assistant Policy Director of the California Wilderness Coalition**. "By allowing exploratory drilling, the BLM is facilitating Silver Standard Resources in compromising those qualities. Even worse, the ultimate result of the exploratory drilling (an open pit mine) will forever and permanently destroy those qualities."

"Tourist-based outdoor recreation is the economic engine for the Eastern Sierra. Local businesses are highly dependent on outdoor recreation," said **Kevin Mazzu, Lone Pine small business owner**. "The thousands of people who visit Death Valley National Park, the Alabama Hills, and other surrounding public lands are our most powerful economic driver."

"If we let this company get a foothold we won't be able to stop them. Once exploration begins it opens the flood gates," said **Kathy Bancroft, Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribal Historic Preservation Officer**. "This is a project about greed. That's why we are united as a community in stopping this project now at the early stages."

Outstanding features of Conglomerate Mesa include:

- Its location on Death Valley's doorstep, making it part of this beloved National Park's viewscape. Visitors to the park contribute millions to the Eastern Sierra's economy. Travel and tourism businesses comprise roughly a third of employment in Inyo County;
- The sweeping views it offers of multiple desert ranges, the Sierra Nevada, and Owen Lake;
- Unique and irreplaceable cultural resources important to the Timbisha-Shoshone and Paiute-Shoshone Tribes, including a population of pinyon trees traditionally harvested for their nuts;
- Historical resources, including the remains of charcoal and stone masonry sites used in the late 1800s to supply the Cerro Gordo mine, and an historic trail from this same time period;
- Multiple special status and rare plant species, including a successfully reproducing rare species of high-altitude Joshua trees;
- Mule deer overwintering and migration habitat, prized by local and visiting hunters; and
- Hunting grounds for golden eagles and mountain lions.

This is the first roadless area in California faced with development threats under the Trump Administration.

"Conglomerate Mesa is a special natural area on Death Valley's doorstep," said **Fran Hunt, Eastern Sierra Organizer of the Sierra Club**. "It's too special to sacrifice to industrial-scale, open pit cyanide heap leach mining that would forever mar views from within and near the park and destroy important cultural, wildlife, and recreational economy values."

Friends of the Inyo, the Sierra Club, and partners are reviewing the decision and deciding on next steps.

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**About Friends of the Inyo**

Founded in 1986, Friends of the Inyo's mission is to protect and care for the public lands of the Eastern Sierra. <http://friendsoftheinyo.org/>

**About the Sierra Club**

Founded by legendary conservationist John Muir in 1892, the Sierra Club is now the nation's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with three million members and supporters. <http://www.sierraclub.org/>