

MARTIN HEINRICH  
FIRST DISTRICT, NEW MEXICO



COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES

THE CAPITOL  
336 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-6316

DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE  
505 MARQUETTE AVENUE NW, SUITE 1605  
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87102  
(505) 346-6781

SOUTH VALLEY  
3211 COORS BOULEVARD SW, SUITE B3  
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87121  
(505) 877-4069

COMMITTEE ON  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS

HEINRICH.HOUSE.GOV

## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

June 1, 2011

Bill Childress, District Manager  
Las Cruces District Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
1800 Marquess Street  
Las Cruces, NM 88005

Dear Mr. Childress:

It has come to my attention that there is a new interest in hardrock mining on Otero Mesa, and I am writing to express my concerns with potential damage to water, cultural and wildlife resources from mining activities. I understand that Geovic Mining Corp. recently staked more than 150 mining claims on Otero Mesa, and plans to conduct small-scale exploratory drilling at two sites this summer.


As you are aware, Otero Mesa is one of our state's most valuable natural resources, encompassing 1.2 million acres of wild desert grassland that harbors more than a thousand native wildlife and plant species, countless irreplaceable cultural and historic resources, and a vast untapped freshwater aquifer. Otero Mesa is treasured by hunters locally as well as the national sportsmen community for its vibrant wildlife populations and backcountry hunting opportunities. It is also an important area to birdwatchers, hikers, and ranchers, and is held sacred by members of the Mescalero Apache Traditional Elders Council.

The importance of these values was confirmed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit in 2009, when the court invalidated BLM's oil and gas leasing and development plan for Otero and Sierra Counties based on the court's finding that BLM inadequately analyzed potential impacts of oil and gas development in causing habitat fragmentation in the grasslands or in contaminating the Salt Basin Aquifer. In the case of hardrock mining, BLM is similarly obligated to conduct a robust analysis of potential impacts to natural resources that is compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act.

Therefore, I encourage the BLM Las Cruces District Office to ensure that any potential mining on Otero Mesa is thoroughly vetted through a public process, and no activities are ultimately permitted that would unduly or permanently impair the natural resources of the grassland. New Mexicans are fortunate to have an abundance of open spaces and wild lands; these iconic landscapes should be protected for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Thank you for your attention to the concerns outlined above.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH  
Member of Congress

cc: Linda Rundell, BLM New Mexico State Director  
Jesse Juen, BLM New Mexico Associate State Director

MH/mah