

ADELITA S. GRIJALVA  
7<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, ARIZONA

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April 17, 2026

The Honorable Tom Schultz  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Schultz,

I am writing regarding the proposed Hermosa Critical Minerals Exploration and Mine Plan of Operations in southern Arizona, and the ongoing objection period for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Record of Decision. I wish to express serious concern about the growing opposition from local communities and the significant risks the project poses to natural resources and public health in Santa Cruz County.

Recent reporting has highlighted troubling water quality concerns in the region, including mine-related testing that detected elevated levels of antimony in local water sources, heightening fears about groundwater contamination and long-term drinking water impacts. In an area defined by limited and sensitive water supplies, even potential contamination poses serious risks to public health, agriculture, and the environment. These concerns—echoed by community members, local governments, and grassroots organizations—extend beyond water quality to include groundwater depletion, ecosystem degradation, and harm to unique wildlife habitats. The scale and complexity of the Hermosa project raise legitimate questions about whether such impacts can be avoided or mitigated, particularly given the cumulative public health risks associated with exposure to mining-related contaminants, degraded air and water quality, increased industrial activity, and the transformation of a rural landscape into an industrial zone.

These concerns are not new. The Town of Patagonia formally requested a comprehensive groundwater study of the Patagonia Mountains from the Coronado National Forest in 2020 and again in 2021, specifically citing risks associated with the proposed Hermosa project. Despite these requests—and support from then-Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva—the study was never conducted. Moving forward without this basic analysis leaves significant uncertainty about groundwater impacts and undermines confidence in the adequacy of the current review.

The Hermosa project remains unusually complex and controversial, warranting the highest level of scrutiny and public engagement. Local governments and community members have previously raised concerns about limited timelines for public review, particularly given language barriers, the technical nature of the materials, and the capacity constraints facing rural communities in Santa Cruz County. The

purpose of the requests was to secure additional time to help navigate language barriers, understand the technical nature of the materials, and engage in meaningful public participation. The decision to deny these requests has only deepened concerns that the process is moving forward without adequately accounting for the voices and well-being of those most directly affected.

Additionally, the Hermosa project's designation as the first critical minerals project under the FAST-41 permitting framework makes it especially consequential. While this framework is intended to improve efficiency of permitting, mining remains one of the most environmentally impactful sectors covered under FAST-41, and therefore expedited permitting must not come at the expense of meaningful public participation.

While I understand the regulatory framework governing objection timelines, the agency retains discretion over how it conducts outreach, engagement, and consideration of public input prior to issuing a final decision. I urge the Forest Service to use all available administrative authorities to ensure the public has a full and fair opportunity to review and meaningfully engage with the Final EIS and Draft Record of Decision before any final action is taken.

To that end, I strongly urge the Forest Service to provide additional time for meaningful public engagement to the extent possible, whether through extension of the objection period or through reopening or supplementing public input opportunities prior to issuing a final decision. Meaningful public engagement should include expanding bilingual outreach and technical assistance, providing additional opportunities for public input, and ensuring that communities have adequate time to review and understand the highly technical materials associated with this project, so that the effective window for public participation is not functionally limited by barriers related to language access, technical complexity, or resource constraints.

Given documented concerns related to groundwater impacts, water quality, and potential contamination in surrounding communities, it is critical that residents have sufficient time and support to fully understand and respond to the potential risks outlined in the Final EIS. Rushing public engagement at this stage risks undermining both the integrity of the NEPA process and public confidence in the final decision. The legitimacy of this process depends on whether affected communities have a real—not merely procedural—opportunity to participate.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adelita S. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Congresswoman Adelita S. Grijalva  
Arizona's 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District