Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2013

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are concerned by reports that the U.S. Forest Service is attempting to expedite the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) on the Rosemont Mine proposal. Because the Rosemont proposal is complex and could have significant environmental impacts, we ask you to ensure the Forest Service fully and completely analyze the impacts of this mining project.

As you know, the Coronado National Forest is reviewing the environmental impacts of the proposed Rosemont copper project in the Santa Rita Mountains south of Tucson pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Coronado sent its draft environmental impact statement to several federal agencies for comment. Agency comments are due to be returned to the Coronado National Forest by August 15, 2013. Government agencies were able to review and comment on the "administrative draft" only after signing off on a "disclaimer" explaining that the document is missing essential elements. These include analysis of endangered species impacts, consultation with Native American communities regarding impacts to historical and cultural sites, Clean Water Act permits, and responses to public comments. Because of this, we believe the Forest Service should take as much time as is needed in order to ensure a thorough and complete review.

Pima County officials have stressed the importance of a thorough environmental impact study, one that takes into account all aspects of Rosemont's proposed plan and its impact on our local water supply, industry, air quality, and transportation infrastructure. The concerns of Pima County and all local stakeholders are critical to ensuring any environmental evaluation is conducted correctly.

We understand that there may be attempts to fast track analysis of agency comments in order to issue a record of decision by September 27, 2013 to avoid the objection period process that will go into effect the following day. An expedited review could lead to an incomplete and less thoughtful analysis of this interagency review. The Forest Service promulgated these regulations for the explicit purpose of resolving conflicts prior to a decision and there is no need to avoid following them for this particular FEIS.

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The Forest Service has no obligation to rush through an environmental assessment. The agency's duty, first and foremost, is to assess the proposed mine's impacts on Arizona's natural resources, water supplies, and public health. Such a review should take the time that is appropriate to ensure full input from the public and stakeholders. The impacts of this study will be permanent and demand full and careful review.

We urge the Forest Service should to take the time required to get the job done right.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Raul M. Grijalva

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Ron Barber

Ron Barber
Member of Congress