

May 23, 2024

Senator Julie Pazina, Chair

Interim Committee on Natural Resources

Transmitted via email to NRInterim@lcb.state.nv.us and Members of the Committee

RE: Information about the potential impacts to biodiversity from proposed lithium and critical minerals exploration and extraction

Dear Senator Pazina and Members of the Natural Resources Committee:

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization with chapters in all fifty states and work in over eighty countries. The Conservancy has been working in Nevada since the early 1980s. We have 30 staff members working for our Nevada chapter and we own and manage nature preserves and conservation easements across the state. We are committed to a collaborative, non-confrontational, science-based approach to achieve our mission of conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Thank you for hearing presentations on the lithium battery economy and supply chain and potential impacts to biodiversity at your June 4, 2024 meeting. At The Nature Conservancy, as we think about the climate solutions that are being pursued, we are also keenly aware that the world is in a biodiversity crisis. We are losing species at a rapid rate. Most of this loss is due to habitat encroachment, fragmentation, and destruction from development and other human activity. It is imperative we ensure that species and ecosystems that make our state and our world so special are protected as we implement climate solutions. We are also concerned with the impacts of climate infrastructure on Tribal and rural communities.

In order to find a balanced approach to climate solutions alongside biodiversity, we advocate for a smart-from-the-start approach to lithium and critical minerals exploration and extraction, mining and renewable energy deployment. A smart-from-the-start approach is one where renewable energy generation, transmission, and storage and mineral extraction can be deployed with as little impact as possible to natural lands, cultural resources, recreation, and other resources that support vibrant communities and ecosystems.

For the past several years, scientists at The Nature Conservancy have been working to understand the potential impacts to biodiversity from proposed lithium extraction in Nevada, California, and across the U.S. With this letter, we are sharing links to recent publications and reports that describe our findings.

Clifford, MJ, SS Parker, L Saito, B. Cohen, and NS Fraga. 2024. Potential impacts of proposed lithium extraction on biodiversity and conservation in Nevada and California. The Nature Conservancy.

https://www.groundwaterresourcehub.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/groundwater-resource-hub/clifford24_Biodiversity_Lithium_Extraction_NV_CA.pdf

Parker SS, MJ Clifford, BS Cohen. 2024. Potential impacts of proposed lithium extraction on biodiversity and conservation in the contiguous United States. *Science of the Total Environment*. doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.168639.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969723072674>

Additionally, The Nature Conservancy contracted with the Desert Research Institute to prepare a framework and checklist for considering potential hydrologic impacts of lithium extraction in Nevada. The framework and checklist are helpful tools for evaluating if there is enough information to understand the risks and potential impacts to land and water resources from mining activities, including exploration, extraction, and closure. The checklist can be viewed and downloaded on the DRI website at this link, <https://www.dri.edu/project/potential-hydrologic-impacts-of-lithium-extraction/>.

There has been a great focus on lithium, which is appropriate, but there is a need to look more broadly than lithium. TNC has identified at least 58 minerals critical to the energy transition and it is highly probable these minerals will increase in demand, which means more exploration and potential mining. TNC recently initiated a critical minerals conservation assessment in six Western states including Nevada. The goal of our study is to better understand the potential impacts of proposed critical mineral projects to biodiversity and communities, and to help communities and stakeholders identify the areas of less conflict. Ensuring that energy related exploration occurs in areas where there is less conflict is better for biodiversity, it is better for our communities, and it will actually enhance the pace of the energy transition.

By sharing this information, we hope to keep nature and communities front and center as we plan for our future energy transition. If we plan correctly, we can meet our decarbonization needs and also preserve biodiversity and community integrity.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Baca', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mauricia M.M. Baca
State Director
The Nature Conservancy in Nevada