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September 6, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

On behalf of the State of Nevada's Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources (JISCNR), we write to express our strong support for the ongoing and future protection of Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and Death Valley National Park. These areas are of profound ecological, cultural, and historical significance not only to Nevada but also to the nation and the world.

The JISCNR is an ongoing statutory committee of the Nevada Legislature whose authority and duties are set forth in *Nevada Revised Statutes* 218E.320 through 218E.330. Meeting between the biennial sessions of the Legislature, the Committee evaluates, reviews, and comments upon matters related to natural resources within Nevada.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, located in Nye County, Nevada, is a sacred site for the Timbisha Shoshone, Southern Paiute, Chemehuevi, and certain Newe and Nuwu peoples. This Refuge, established in 1984, plays a crucial role in preserving the unique habitats of over 30 springs, seeps, and sloughs sustained by ancient groundwater. These habitats support the highest local concentration of endemic species in the United States, with at least 26 unique species, including 12 listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. §§1531–1544). The Refuge's importance is further highlighted by its proximity to the critically endangered Devils Hole pupfish (*Cyprinodon diabolis*), which is dependent on maintaining adequate water levels in Devils Hole in Death Valley National Park.

The Amargosa River and the underlying Death Valley regional carbonate aquifer are vital for sustaining these ecosystems and the surrounding communities. The communities of Amargosa Valley, Crystal, and Johnnie in Nevada; as well as Furnace Creek, Death Valley Junction, Shoshone, and Tecopa in California all depend on these waters for their livelihoods.

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Given the threats posed by potential mining activities on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, which could severely impact groundwater resources, we strongly urge the U.S. Congress and the Secretary of the Interior to take immediate and decisive action. Specifically, we support an administrative withdrawal of public lands from new mineral entry for a temporary period of 20 years of these lands through legislative action.

This withdrawal is crucial for preserving the irreplaceable cultural and biological values cherished by tribes, local communities, and visitors from around the globe. It will also enhance Nevada's ability to manage its groundwater resources sustainably.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Jann Stinnesbeck, Committee Policy Analyst (775-684-6825 or jann.stinnesbeck@lcb.state.nv.us), if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

Senator Julie Pazina, Chair
Joint Interim Standing Committee on Natural Resources

JP/lc:W242277

cc: The Honorable Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)
The Honorable Martha Williams, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
The Honorable Charles F. Sams III, Director, National Park Service, DOI
The Honorable Jon Raby, Nevada State Director, BLM, DOI