

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 10, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write in opposition to any unilateral executive action to designate more national monuments in Arizona, and we specifically oppose recent requests that you designate a “Grand Canyon Watershed National Monument” in northern Arizona. Such proposals, without the necessary support from state leaders, congressional delegation, and proper reviews should not advance. This proposal, in particular, extends far afield from the intent of the Antiquities Act by seeking to lock away 1.7 million acres of land in Arizona—an area larger than the State of Delaware—from hunting, livestock, wildfire prevention, mining, and certain forms of outdoor recreation and tourism. What’s more, as noted by Supreme Court precedent, such a designation could also have grave consequences for surface and groundwater rights in Arizona.

Aside from federal overreach, the greatest threat to the watershed of the Grand Canyon is the ongoing 15-year drought in the Southwest. A national monument designation does nothing to address the historically low snowmelt or surface water levels that feed the Colorado River and its tributaries. Arguably, the creation of a new monument might worsen watershed health if land managers and private property owners are restricted from thinning the area’s overgrown forests or if hunters are barred from culling overpopulated wildlife. Arizona cannot afford to have its hands tied when it comes to controlling wildlife populations, enhancing its water supplies, and preventing wildfires.

This monument proposal would also further unravel a longstanding agreement made by a number of environmental organizations and relevant stakeholders in support of a multiple-use philosophy across much of this area. As part of a locally driven collaborative process that included local miners and cattle growers, Congress passed the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 with the full understanding and intention that federally regulated mining and grazing would continue on much of the Arizona Strip and the Kaibab National Forest.

We of course support preserving the Grand Canyon for the enjoyment of future generations—the existing national park does just that. The Park’s powerful, awe-inspiring landscape attracts over 5 million visitors from across the United States and abroad each year. Ensuring the protection of this crown jewel is the civic duty of every Arizonan and American, and we appreciate the heartfelt motivation by those in Congress who initially backed this concept. However, the current monument proposal is ill-conceived, single-minded, and impractical to implement, and we respectfully urge you to disregard it.

Sincerely,

  
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John McCain  
United States Senator

  
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Jeff Flake  
United States Senator