

BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL

Report To The Chairman, Subcommittee On  
Mines And Mining, House Committee On  
Interior And Insular Affairs Of The United States  
OF THE UNITED STATES

Mining On National Park  
Service Lands -- What Is At Stake?

The Department of the Interior recommended to the Congress in 1979 that mining claims on certain National Park Service lands be acquired for environmental protection. GAO found that these recommendations were based on vague and misleading environmental and cost data and, if implemented, could result in costs substantially in excess of the reported estimates.

GAO believes that the Congress should defer any action to acquire mining claims on these National Park Service lands. GAO recommends that the Department notify the Congress that it no longer supports these outstanding recommendations and submit more thorough analysis of the need and costs of acquiring these claims.

GAO also found that Interior did not fully analyze the mineral supply implications of its recommendations. Specifically, Interior failed to assess adequately the effects of acquiring the mining claims on the U.S. need for the minerals and the cost to replace them from other sources.

The National Park Service now states that current mining regulations have ensured that mining on these park lands is occurring in an environmentally acceptable manner. However, NPS had not considered less costly means of achieving the same results. This is particularly true for Death Valley National Monument, an area historically and currently important for mineral production.



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