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Comments: As the current mandate is that the USFS is to provide for access for mineral exploration and to coordinate the combined inter-agency cooperation to review and evaluate mineral proposals on federal lands. A full withdrawal of the region is in direct violation of the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970, Congress declared that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in the national interest, to foster and encourage private enterprise in (among other goals) the development of domestic mineral resources and the reclamation of mined land. This Federal policy obviously applies to National Forest System lands. (source excerpt)

Furthermore (source excerpt) 'as mandated by the National Forest Management Act of 1976, which is the principal tool for assuring that mineral resources are given proper consideration. Before plans are developed, specialists evaluate all resource activities including existing and potential mineral development. Planners and decision makers then formulate plans to minimize potential resource conflicts and maximize the various uses and values of National Forest System lands. Since minerals are usually hidden, relatively rare, and governed by certain preferential laws, the land management planning procedures provide for the availability of minerals and development of mineral operations where possible.' This position published by the USFS directly indicates that the responsibility is on the USFS to work with other agencies to provide and ensure the 'possible' minerals are made available by evaluating proposals and not creating limitations to access to the lands and minerals.

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While I believe steps must be taken to ensure the region included in this withdrawal is protected from harm and misuse the current governmental direction is for the USFS to provide oversight and coordinated evaluations of projects to protect the surface resources and not simply remove land or minerals from consideration. Instead the USFC and BLM should coordinate factual basis investigations into proposals and work through the various agencies to provide access to federal land.

I do not support moving forward with a withdrawal but do indeed support detailed evaluation of projects on the risks they may create to the surface resources.