

THE CASE OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS



Stewards Group: You are a Materials Scientist

Your Background and Biography

You are a retired metallurgist who spent your career studying the physical properties of metal alloys. Your specialties were the lanthanide series (the rare earth metals) and the actinide series (radioactive elements such as thorium, uranium, and plutonium). You worked mostly in the system of national laboratories funded by the U.S. government. Sometimes you did secret work that was relevant to nuclear weapons. Your unclassified work explored new methods for recovering rare earth elements from electronic waste.

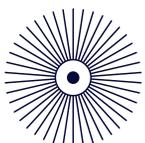
By the end of your career you were at Ames Laboratory in charge of the Critical Materials Institute, a research organization established by the U.S. government after the 2010 rare earths crisis. In that job you talked to many groups of people who were concerned about rare earths: electronics manufacturers, mining and refining companies, start-up recycling firms, the Department of Defense, even Congress from time to time. As a government administrator you felt you had to be careful when you spoke about things that were politically contentious. During some presidential administrations you would not even say “climate change” in public.

Now that you have retired, you can be more outspoken. You do not want to leave your grandchildren a dangerously unstable climate. You were thrilled when a prominent environmental advocacy organization asked you to serve as a Steward.

In this negotiation you want to make sure it is possible to make enough rare earth metals, produced in responsible ways, to develop and expand the low-carbon energy technologies the world needs to prevent global warming. Your particular responsibility is knowing the science and not letting scientifically unrealistic ideas endanger an effective Sustainability Seal.

Your Role

Your goal is to write a statement of guiding values that will set the standards for sustainable practices within the rare earth elements industry. Learn as much as possible from the experts to ensure you make the right decision. During this hearing you should do the following:



- Keep an open mind. Allow yourself to be persuaded by well-reasoned arguments and convincing evidence.
- Find out as much as possible about the issues so you can carefully evaluate the arguments presented. Consider what is in the best interest of the environment and our future.
- Facilitate discussion and cooperation within and among the groups. Your goal is to implement the best, most effective set of Sustainability Seal guiding values possible, which will require compromise between groups.

Your Assignment

You will become an expert on either the Producers or the Activists Group and report back to your fellow Stewards with an evaluation of the group's position and arguments. Engage in the following activities as you conduct your research:

- Attend the meetings of the group to learn more about its arguments and to plan for the hearing. Remember that you are an observer, so you should not participate in discussion.
- Write two questions you would like to ask the group during the hearing.
- Write a one-page analysis of the group's main arguments and positions. What are its main concerns? Which of its arguments do you find convincing? Which are unconvincing? Why?

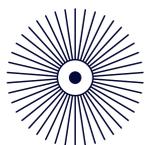
SOURCES

Group Sources

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