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Uranium Mine Threatens Grand Canyon's Endangered Species, Meets With Legal Challenge

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, *Ariz.*— The Center for Biological Diversity, Grand Canyon Trust, and Sierra Club today filed a 60-day [notice of intent to sue](#) the Bureau of Land Management over Endangered Species Act violations connected to Grand Canyon uranium mining. The Bureau has failed to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the potential impacts of the Arizona 1 uranium mine, located just north of Grand Canyon National Park, to threatened and endangered species.

The Bureau has been relying on old information and an outdated, inadequate environmental analysis, which violates the National Environmental Policy Act. The agency failed to supplement its 1988 environmental assessment for the mine and prepare a new environmental impact statement in light of new science and circumstances relevant to the mine's potential impacts.

The Arizona 1 mine is located within the 1 million acres of land that were temporarily protected from mining via a segregation order enacted by the Department of the Interior on July 20. The segregation prohibits new mining claims and subjects the exploration and mining of existing claims to valid existing rights. That means the Bureau must not allow mining to begin until valid existing rights are established for the Arizona 1 mine's claims.

Because the mine has been closed for more than a decade, a new "plan of operations" is legally required, since Bureau of Land Management regulations hold that those plans are only in effect while mines are in operation. Mining officials have stated in the media that mining could resume at the Arizona 1 mine as early as this fall.

"Today's notice affords the Bureau of Land Management both the opportunity and justification to correct its illegal course," said Taylor McKinnon with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The Grand Canyon and its endangered species deserve complete protection from the uranium industry. And relying on outdated and incomplete reviews falls far short of that standard."

In 1984, a flash flood swept four tons of high-grade uranium ore from a uranium mine near Arizona 1 through Hack Canyon and Kanab Creek into the Colorado River and Grand Canyon National Park. The 1988 environmental assessment states that the Arizona 1 mine, which is constructed in the bottom of a wash, is prone to unplanned releases that would follow the same water course. Since 1988, four species of fish native to the Colorado River, as well as southwestern willow flycatchers, have been added to the endangered species list, and critical habitat has been designated for their recovery.

"Experience has shown that uranium development can permanently poison land and water in this arid region," said Roger Clark with the Grand Canyon Trust. "Prohibiting uranium mining in Grand Canyon watersheds is essential to prevent further contamination of our nation's irreplaceable resources."

Spikes in uranium prices have caused thousands of new uranium claims, dozens of proposed exploration drilling projects, and proposals to reopen old uranium mines adjacent to Grand Canyon. Renewed uranium development threatens to degrade wildlife habitat and industrialize now-wild and iconic landscapes bordering the park; it also threatens to contaminate aquifers that discharge into Grand Canyon National Park and the Colorado River. The Park Service [warns against drinking](#) from several creeks in the Canyon exhibiting elevated uranium levels in the wake of past uranium mining.

"Uranium mining has great potential to contaminate water that flows into the Colorado River via various seeps, springs, and streams," said Stacey Hamburg with the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter. "Our drinking water and all of the Grand Canyon's wildlife is just too important to risk for the short-term profits of this mining company."

Proposed uranium development has provoked [litigation](#), public [protests](#), and statements of concern and opposition from scientists, city officials, county officials, former Governor Janet Napolitano, the Navajo, Kaibab Paiute, Hopi, Hualapai and Havasupai tribes, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, and the Southern Nevada Water Authority, among others. Statewide polling conducted by Public Opinion Strategies shows overwhelming public support for withdrawing from mineral entry the lands near Grand Canyon; Arizonans support protecting the Grand Canyon area from uranium mining by a two-to-one margin.

The Bureau of Land Management has 60 days to correct its violations of the Endangered Species Act before being sued. Conservation groups may file suit sooner on claims relating to the National Environmental Policy Act and Mining Law of 1872 should the Bureau allow mining to start before that 60-day period expires.

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