

Grand Canyon Under Threat as Trump's Nuclear Working Group Considers Allowing Uranium Mining

Pressure Mounts from Right-Wing Industry Groups to Revoke Protections, Allow Uranium Mining Around Grand Canyon.

By [Western Values Project](#)

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Right-wing groups like the Heritage Foundation have previously [recommended](#) revoking the mineral withdrawal area, which would again allow dangerous uranium mining around Grand Canyon National Park. Meanwhile, the White House Nuclear Fuel Working Group — a working group reviewing how to support the uranium and nuclear energy industry — missed another [deadline](#) for delivering its recommendations to the administration, prolonging a decision on whether the Trump administration will revoke the Grand Canyon Mining Withdrawal Area.

“Should the Trump administration opt to side with the extreme measures recommended by an industry-funded think tank like the Heritage Foundation, the future of one of America’s most cherished national parks will be at risk,” said Jayson O’Neill, Deputy Director of Western Values Project. “Our public lands, waterways and national parks are far too important to allow industry-backed groups to dictate policy, but that has been the hallmark of the Trump presidency.”

The Heritage Foundation’s [recommendations](#) include the so-called restoration of the 1984 Arizona Wilderness Act. This would repeal a 2012 Obama-era decision that [halted](#) mineral mining on over 1 million acres of wilderness and public lands around the Grand Canyon National Park. Repealing the mineral mining withdrawal area would [grossly](#) over-benefit uranium mining corporations by allowing access to uranium deposits on formally federally-protected public lands.

Heritage’s recommends also go as far as suggesting the administration repeal the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) — a 50-year-old environmental law that [ensures](#) federal agencies consider the potential environmental consequences of any large-scale project they take on. The Trump administration has a [history](#) of repealing conservation and environmental protections, with presently 85 rules being challenged or rolled back.

It would be unsurprising if the Trump administration and Interior Secretary Bernhardt opted to follow Heritage’s recommendations in siding with uranium mining corporations. The Trump administration is [stacked](#) with former Heritage alumni and at least four current [appointees](#) with connections to the group work at the Interior Department.

Additionally, allowing further access to mineral mining corporations around the Grand Canyon would potentially benefit one of [Bernhardt’s](#) former lobbying [clients](#): Ur-Energy USA Inc. The mining corporation, along with Energy Fuels Inc., [petitioned](#) the Trump

administration in January 2018, to impose import quotas on uranium by filing a ‘Section 232’ probe.

Background

The Trump administration [inexplicably](#) included uranium on the ‘critical minerals’ list even though it [failed](#) to meet the criteria of the original executive [order](#). This move signaled a threat to the 20-year moratorium on new uranium and other hard-rock mining claims in the Grand Canyon’s watershed.

Previously, Sec. Bernhardt has shown a pattern of siding with mining corporations, [already](#) proposing a dangerous [rule](#) that would allow the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to rent public lands to non-energy mineral extractive corporations at a cheaper price and cut royalty rates on public lands — a boon for the former mega-lobbyist’s clients. The proposed rule raised questions, once again, about the Secretary’s ties to industrial mining corporations and his allegiances to his former clients.

Bernhardt [provided](#) ‘legal services’ for Ur-Energy USA Inc. from 2009 to 2012. Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Andrew Wheeler, another ex-lobbyist, previously [represented](#) Energy Fuels Inc. where he successfully lobbied the Trump administration to illegally reduce the size of the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah because of its [proximity](#) to the corporation’s uranium mine and processing facility.

The Trump administration’s Forest Service [recommended](#) that the Grand Canyon Withdrawal Area be lifted “as part of the Trump administration’s broader effort to sweep away regulations impeding development.” The Department of Commerce also released sweeping [recommendations](#) on ‘critical minerals’ that call for the deregulation of mining and an expedited permitting process for industrial-scale development on federal public lands.

The Koch Brothers have funded both the Heritage Foundation and other industry front groups that opposed a ban on uranium mining in the Grand Canyon. Acting Interior Solicitor [Daniel Jorjani](#) was a former ‘key Koch employee’ and became one of their ‘highest paid employees.’

The Charles Koch Foundation gave \$300,000 to the Heritage Foundation in 2013. “Other major contributions during 2013 went to free market-oriented think tanks, research groups and educational organizations. Among them are the [American Enterprise Institute](#) (\$910,000); Liberty Source, known now as [Strata](#) (\$653,000); the [Bill of Rights Institute](#) (\$350,000) and the [Heritage Foundation](#) (\$300,000).” [The Center For Public Integrity, [10/30/15](#)]

Koch-Funded Donors Trust also gives money to the Heritage Foundation. “Donors Trust is not the source of the money it hands out. Some 200 right-of-center funders who’ve given at least \$10,000 fill the group’s coffers. Charities bankrolled by Charles and David Koch, the DeVoses, and the Bradleys, among other conservative benefactors, have given to Donors Trust.” [Mother Jones, [02/13/13](#)]

- Donors Trust has given to the Heritage Foundation, among other conservative organizations. “And other recipients of Donors Trust money [include](#) the Heritage Foundation, Grover Norquist’s Americans for Tax Reform, the [NRA’s Freedom Action Foundation](#), the Cato Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the

Federalist Society, and the Americans for Prosperity Foundation, [chaired](#) (PDF) by none other than David Koch.” [Mother Jones, [02/13/13](#)]

Charles And David Koch funded the Arizona-based Prosper Inc. and Prosper Foundation Inc. “A dark money group backed by Charles and David Koch is behind a well-funded effort to undermine protections at the Grand Canyon and overturn the Antiquities Act, the law President Teddy Roosevelt used to permanently [protect the area](#) in 1908. If successful, the campaign could stop a permanent ban on uranium mining near the canyon’s rim, despite support for such a ban by a vast majority of Arizonans. [...] The Koch brothers’ anti-park effort is being run through the Arizona-based [Prosper Inc.](#) and its sister organization the [Prosper Foundation Inc.](#), which share a physical address, a logo, a staff, and a founder—Kirk Adams. Adams served as Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives from 2009 to 2011, ran a [failed attempt](#) for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2012, and is currently the Chief of Staff to Arizona Governor Doug Ducey.” [ThinkProgress, [03/02/16](#)]

- Prosper co-authored a report with The Arizona Chamber Of Commerce Foundation calling protecting the lands around the Grand Canyon a “monumental mistake.” Earlier this year, Prosper [co-authored a report](#) with the Arizona Chamber of Commerce Foundation, which declared that protecting the public lands around the Grand Canyon National Park as a national monument would be a ‘monumental mistake’ that represents ‘unwarranted and unwanted federal overreach’ and would ‘undermine’ the state of Arizona.” [ThinkProgress, [03/02/16](#)]
- The report is part of an “organized campaign” to allow uranium mining in the lands around the Grand Canyon. “The joint Prosper/Arizona Chamber of Commerce effort is part of an organized campaign to enable uranium mining on public lands next to the Grand Canyon. The campaign opposes the creation of the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage National Monument, which would permanently ban uranium mining in the area. A broad-based coalition, which includes [Arizona’s Native American tribes](#), [small businesses](#), and [conservation groups](#), have asked President Obama to use the Antiquities Act to protect the 1.7 million-acre gateway to the Grand Canyon and permanently prohibit new uranium mines on the canyon’s rim.” [ThinkProgress, [03/02/16](#)]

Prosper Inc.’s website only touted two major issues, one of which included defeating the Grand Canyon Monument. “Adams’ group and its sister organization, Prosper Inc., are touted as ‘social welfare that supports and defends free-market principles,’ but according to [Prosper Inc.’s website](#), it only has two big issues: Defeating the Grand Canyon Monument and drumming up support for Proposition 123, Ducey’s proposal to raise money for public education by dipping into the state’s land trust fund.” [Phoenix New Times, [04/18/16](#)]

Prosper received more than 80% of its total budget from an organization led by a consultant with “deep ties” to the Koch Brothers. “Interested in learning more about the Prosper Foundation, [Greg] Zimmerman [of the Center for Western Priorities looked through its 990 tax forms, which not-for-profit groups must file with the Internal Revenue Service. He found that between 2013 and 2014, the foundation received more than \$1.5m – or 83% of its total budget – from a political-advocacy organization called American Encore.” [The Guardian, [04/21/16](#)]

- American Encore is led by Sean Noble, “A political consultant who has deep ties

to the Koch Brothers.” “Sean Noble, a political consultant who has deep ties to the Koch brothers, leads American Encore. The organization is formerly known as the Center to Protect Patient Rights. It changed its name in 2014.” [The Guardian, [04/21/16](#)]

- Money was being funneled to the Prosper Foundation so it could continue opposing the Grand Canyon National Monument Plan. “Zimmerman discovered that a donor from the Koch brothers’ funding network was funneling money into the Prosper Foundation, so the group could continue its on-the-ground campaign to block the Grand Canyon national monument plan.” [The Guardian, [04/21/16](#)]

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