

The Movement to Protect Grand Canyon from Uranium Mining. Threat to People, Land, Water and Wildlife

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The National Congress of American Indians and conservation groups today [urged](#) Sen. Martha McSally (R-Ariz.) to cosponsor the [Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act](#), which permanently bans new uranium mining across 1 million acres of public land around Grand Canyon National Park.

McSally has not said whether she supports the bill, introduced in December by Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.). In a letter to McSally, the groups said the region must be protected from new uranium mining because of the “risks that mining poses to the Grand Canyon and the people and economies that depend upon its health.”

In October a companion bill led by Reps. Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.) and Tom O’Halloran (D-Ariz.) passed the House with bipartisan support. It followed an effort led by tribal leaders from the Havasupai Tribe with the support of the Hualapai Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, National Congress of American Indians and Intertribal Council of Arizona. A broad coalition of business owners, local government leaders, Arizona Trail users, river runners, conservation groups and others who oppose uranium mining in the Grand Canyon region also endorsed the House bill.

Today’s letter explains the threats from uranium mining to the Grand Canyon’s waters and wildlife, natural landscape connections, tribal nations, communities and sacred sites. The letter also rebuts false claims from the mining industry and emphasizes that mining contamination risks thousands of jobs and the Grand Canyon’s billion-dollar tourism economy.

Quotes From Groups’ Representatives

“The National Congress of American Indians strongly opposes any actions that would potentially harm the vital water resources in and around the Grand Canyon,” said NCAI CEO Kevin Allis. “Tribal nations have relied on the surface water and groundwater resources in the Upper Colorado River Basin for millennia, way before the United States granted the Grand Canyon federal protections as a National Park, and the protection of those vital resources is why our membership passed Resolution REN-19-001, ‘Opposing Mining on Public Land and Around the Grand Canyon Without Tribal Nations’ Free Prior and Informed Consent.’ Tribal homelands were intended to provide a permanent homeland for present and future generations, and this necessarily includes protecting our natural and cultural heritage resources from the

unnecessary contamination often associated with mining activities.”

“Arizona is ‘the Grand Canyon State.’ It’s also the home of extensive, deadly uranium mining contamination that, after decades, continues to destroy the lives and health of Arizona residents, particularly on the Navajo Nation,” said Amber Reimondo, energy program director for the Grand Canyon Trust. “Uranium contamination is forever and it’s a gamble this state has no business making again, let alone in the Grand Canyon region. This should not be a difficult call for a senator from Arizona to make.”

“This legislation is about the protection of one of the places Arizonans value most, the Grand Canyon,” stated Laura Dent, executive director of Chispa Arizona. “If there is ever a time to stand up for Arizona and defend our air, water, and sacred lands, it is through supporting one of the wonders of the world from destructive uranium mining. It is a no-brainer that ARIZONA Senator McSally should protect and defend the Grand Canyon State’s greatest treasure.”

“The Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act is key to preventing more toxic pollution and the harm it will cause to public, Navajo, Havasupai and Hopi lands. This legislation is urgently needed to protect the waters, wildlife, and people who live and work in the Grand Canyon region from further harm. It’s time for Sen. McSally to act,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter.

“Protecting the Grand Canyon from deadly uranium mining should be a priority for both of the Grand Canyon state’s senators,” said Taylor McKinnon, a public lands campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity. “The Grand Canyon region is under new threats from the Trump administration despite the uranium industry’s toxic legacy. This bill will ensure that the life-giving waters of the planet’s most spectacular canyon are permanently protected from uranium mining’s devastation.”

“Uranium mining threatens the Grand Canyon’s water supply, including that of the native Havasupai people,” said Kevin Dahl, senior Arizona program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. “Nearly identical legislation passed the House in a bipartisan vote that demonstrated overwhelming support, proving that Americans share a common goal in defending and preserving the Grand Canyon’s fragile and limited water supply. The Senate now has the unique opportunity to create a lasting conservation legacy for this beloved national treasure, and we urge Senator McSally to permanently protect the Grand Canyon from uranium mining by passing the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act.”

“Grand Canyon’s awe-inspiring landscapes, its wild and human communities, its great wealth of tribal nations, and Arizona’s outdoor recreation economy, need this protection now,” admonishes Kelly Burke, executive director of Wild Arizona. In supporting this bill, Arizona Senator McSally has a powerful and forward-looking opportunity to forever secure the Canyon’s magnificent rimlands and the iconic Arizona Trail against new uranium mining industrialization and the irreversible contamination of water sources.”

“It should be easy for Sen. McSally to take a stand for an iconic American landmark,” said Heidi McIntosh, managing attorney of the Earthjustice Rocky Mountain regional office. “Leaders in both parties across the country have already done so. We hope she will do the right thing and put the health of essential water sources and public lands before polluters’ profits.”

“The Grand Canyon is a treasured landscape that Arizonans value and respect. Protecting the integrity of Grand Canyon and the health of neighboring communities from uranium mining has enormous support in Arizona and across

the country,” said Mike Quigley, Arizona state director for the Wilderness Society. “We look for Senator McSally to act on behalf of her constituents and cosponsor the Grand Canyon Centennial Protection Act.”

“Some places are so sacred that they should be off limits to extraction for all time,” said Sharon Buccino, senior director of the land division of the Nature Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council. “We can’t afford to subject the Grand Canyon to dangerous uranium mining that puts local communities and waters at risk. Senator McSally can do the right thing on behalf of Arizonans — and all of us that value this treasured landscape — by signing on to this legislation.”

Background

Mining in the Grand Canyon region is a threat to the people, land, water and wildlife that make this place so extraordinary. Uranium mining has left a legacy of toxic pollution and chronic health problems on the Navajo Nation. The Orphan Mine in Grand Canyon National Park has already cost taxpayers more than \$15 million to clean up. There is no economic or national security benefit that outweighs the risk uranium mining poses to the Grand Canyon and the people and economies that depend on the region and the water resources it supplies.

In 2012 the Department of Interior temporarily withdrew more than 1 million acres of public lands around Grand Canyon National Park from new mining claims under the 1872 Mining Law. This banned new mining claims and the development of all but a handful of pre-existing mines for 20 years, the maximum period allowed administratively. That ban has been unsuccessfully challenged by mining interests. In 2017 President Donald Trump issued an [executive order](#) that resulted in the U.S. Forest Service identifying the Grand Canyon mining ban as an action for review to enhance domestic energy development.

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