

Protecting Habitat, Wildlife, and Water Resources around the Grand Canyon from Uranium Mining

Number 2019-06

WHEREAS, in 2011, the National Wildlife Federation resolved to call on appropriate state and federal policymakers to support the maintenance of moratoria on the construction and operation of uranium mines and mills adjacent to the Grand Canyon and in the watersheds of the Southeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States, until such time as peer-reviewed, scientific studies prove that uranium mining, milling, and waste disposal can be safely carried out and secured; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, the National Wildlife Federation also resolved to urge the United States Congress to remove uranium from the General Mining Act of 1872 and re-designate it as a leasable mineral under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920; and

WHEREAS, in 2011 the National Wildlife Federation also resolved to urge appropriate state and federal policymakers to implement policies to safeguard wildlife, habitat and water resources against the negative impacts of mining, milling and storage of uranium; and

WHEREAS, in 2009 Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar placed a temporary moratorium on new uranium mining claims on one million acres adjacent to the Grand and then in 2112 placed a 20-year moratorium on the same area to fully study and evaluate the impacts of proposed new mines and accelerated levels of mining at existing mines on water quality and effects on soils, vegetation, wildlife and their habitats; and

WHEREAS, the 2012 Northern Arizona Mineral Withdrawal was thoroughly and publicly vetted and overwhelmingly supported by local citizens, hunters and anglers, community leaders and state and federal politicians; and the support for this long-term withdrawal was non-partisan and very broad based, and thus very different from other issues like national monument designations; and

WHEREAS, the necessary studies for which the 2012 Northern Arizona Mineral Withdrawal was intended as outlined in the USGS 15 year science plan—to understand contamination risks to wildlife, habitat, humans and water—have not been completed as planned, and will not be completed by the expiration of the temporary withdrawal, and the Congressional approval for these studies remains unfunded; and

WHEREAS, the hydrology of breccia pipe mines in the Grand Canyon watershed are not sufficiently understood to prevent unintended contamination, as evidenced by the Pine Nut mine unexpected filling up with 3 million gallons of contaminated water in 2009 and then Canyon mine similarly filling with contaminated water in 2017; and

WHEREAS, water quality monitoring by Energy Fuels of a waste water pond used for their uranium mining operations near Kanab Creek that flows into the Colorado River has reported water samples at nearly 99 parts of uranium per billion and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers anything above 30 parts per billion unsafe to drink; and

WHEREAS, there are over 500 abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Nation alone, and in 2008 the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers found 38 of 226 water sources (17 percent) with uranium radio nuclides at levels above maximum contaminant levels; and

WHEREAS, in 2017 the Environmental Protection Agency agreed to pay \$600 million to clean up 94 mines, and the Orphan Mine on the south rim of the Grand Canyon National Park has already cost \$15 million and is not complete to date; and the total bill to the U.S. taxpayer for uranium mine clean up is already well over \$ 1 billion with many hundreds of millions of dollars needed for cleanup in the future; and

WHEREAS, waste water ponds used in uranium mining operations in the arid regions of the proposed Grand Canyon Withdrawal Area are “attractive nuisances” for wildlife and have the potential to become “contaminant sinks” that may adversely impact wildlife species (e.g., birds, bats and other small mammals); and that in 2017 the U.S. Geological Survey scientists in their findings identified the need to maintain a watchful eye over wildlife inhabiting and foraging in mine ponds due to concerns of potential concentration of arsenic and selenium contamination; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, foreign owned mining companies and the Western Caucus asked the Department of Commerce to implement quotas on uranium that would mandate a 300% increase in U.S. uranium production; and

WHEREAS, no monitoring or bonding policies have been put in place to safeguard water and habitat around breccia pipe uranium mines in the region as evidenced by Canyon mine misting contaminated water into the air in 2017; and

WHEREAS, Grand Canyon National Park is one of the most iconic parks in the U.S. National Park system with over 6 million visitors annually and the Grand Canyon watershed area is the primary economic driver for the region; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado River provides downstream water for over 40 million people that depend on safe clean water for drinking and other domestic water use, and over 4 million acres of agricultural lands and their operators downstream also depend on clean safe water for irrigation and the production of food crops (e.g., lettuce); and

WHEREAS, all other “Multiple Use” activities (Multiple Use – Sustained Yield Act of 1960 – Public Law 86-517; Federal Land and Policy Management Act of 1976) on the federal public lands (i.e., U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management) outside of the Grand Canyon National Park within the proposed mineral withdrawal area such as timber management, range management, wildlife management, water management and, public recreation (e.g., hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, Off Highway Vehicle use) would continue as currently allowed.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the National Wildlife Federation at its annual meeting assembled June 5-8, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri urges the U.S. Congress to permanently protect the 1 million acres around the Grand Canyon National Park as identified as the Northern Arizona Mineral Withdrawal from future Uranium mining.