

Department of the Interior  
ATTN: Interior Secretary Ken Salazar  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Cc: Scott Florence, Arizona Strip District Manager  
345 East Riverside Drive  
St. George, Utah 84790-6714

May 4, 2011

Re: Proposed Mineral Exploration Withdrawal near Grand Canyon National Park

We are a group of 34 ecology-minded undergraduate and graduate students and supporters from the Colorado Plateau and California, representing the rich cultural diversity of these regions. We recently met in Flagstaff for a Leadership Meeting of the Ecological Society of America's (ESA) Strategies for Ecology Education Diversity and Sustainability (SEEDS) program. We are writing to express our unified support in protecting the Grand Canyon's 1-million-acre watershed from uranium mining as outlined in Alternative B in the Draft Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal Environmental Impact Statement and Revisions to the Withdrawal Application, Arizona.

The impact of uranium mining in the Colorado River watershed has the potential to impact us all, though we come from across the Colorado Plateau and the state of California. Uranium mining threatens to pollute the aquifers feeding Grand Canyon and many communities that rely on Colorado River water. The ecological implications are profound. The mines would develop the wildlands surrounding the Grand Canyon and damage wildlife habitat. There is no guarantee that the mines would not contaminate the land to the point where it would be impossible to clean up. Fragile soils and cryptobiotic crusts in the region are greatly vulnerable to wind erosion in the semi-arid, windy climate. Surface disturbances typical of mining operations have large footprints due to dust and erosion. Indeed, one of our students is studying the effect of increased dust from projects such as the proposed uranium mines. Colorado Plateau dust forces an earlier and faster snowmelt on the San Juan Mountains of Colorado.

In addition to the ecological considerations, many of us come from communities that have already suffered from a legacy of uranium mining pollution. More uranium mining would only add to this legacy. We now know that exposure to uranium can cause cancer, blood diseases, psychological disorders and fertility problems. Many of these health issues already exist in Navajo and Hopi communities due to incomplete cleanup of mine tailings and milling sites from past mining activities. The mining operations in the proposed withdrawal area pose a serious threat to the Hualapai Nation, in addition to the Navajo and Hopi Nations as a result of the transport of uranium ore on regional highways and roadways. Any spills or accidental releases during transport would pose serious contamination hazards.

Please protect the Grand Canyon watershed by withdrawing the entire area described in Alternative B from location and entry under the Mining Law for 20 years. Please put our region's ecosystems and cultures first. As a unified group of ecology-minded students of the region, we stand ready to assist in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Melissa Armstrong, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Leiloni Begaye, Las Cruces, New Mexico  
Brandon Canyon, Tuba City, Arizona  
Nicole Carbone, Davis, California  
Flora Champenois, Berkeley, California  
Tanika Connesero Sanchez, Chico, California  
Cherish Connolly, Tempe, Arizona  
Colleen Cooley, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Songling Du, Tempe, Arizona  
Ricardo Duran, Tempe, Arizona  
David Gonzalez, Davis, California  
Jessica Guo, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Burnell Jones, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Carrie Nuva Joseph, Tucson, Arizona  
Mattias Lanas, Palo Alto, California  
Lauralee Larios, Berkeley, California  
Kate Lowry, Palo Alto, California  
Josh Mackie, San Jose, California  
James McKenzie, Tsalie, Arizona  
Ernest Peyketewa, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Mike Remke, Durango, Colorado  
Verena Serafin, Shiprock, New Mexico  
Kelsey Scott, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Julaire Scott, Flagstaff, Arizona  
Starlene Tsinniginnie, Sanders, Arizona  
Autumn Waconda, Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Vincent Waquiu, Albuquerque, New Mexico  
Cindy Wilber, Palo Alto, California  
Christina Wong, Tempe, Arizona  
Christopher Yazzie, Tuba City, Arizona  
Jerry Yazzie, Tsalie, Arizona  
Matthew Yazzie, Tsalie, Arizona  
Loren Yellowhair, Tuba City, Arizona  
Pai Hui Yu, Davis, California