

**Statement of  
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U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Before the  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
and the  
Subcommittee on Water and Power,  
Committee on Natural Resource  
United States House of Representatives**

**April 8, 2010**

**Concerning**

**Challenges Facing Grand Canyon National Park**

Chairman Grijalva, Chairwoman Napolitano, members of both subcommittees and members of the House at large, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the Department's perspective on "Challenges Facing the Grand Canyon." The Grand Canyon is truly a wonder of the world and for over a century the employees of the Kaibab National Forest have worked with their counterparts in the Grand Canyon National Park to protect and enhance this majestic landscape.

The 1.56 million acre Kaibab National Forest surrounds much of the Park. The North Kaibab Ranger District portion of the Kaibab National Forest adjoins the north side of the canyon while the Tusayan Ranger District adjoins the south side. The lands of the North Kaibab Ranger District are part of a string of federally managed lands that include two National Monuments that surround the Grand Canyon. Together with National Park employees we are actively working on challenges such as access and travel management, fire suppression, and issues of concern to local tribes among others. Here are some examples:

The Kaibab National Forest is in the process of completing a travel management analysis which will designate a motorized road system and halt cross-country travel by off-road vehicles. The Tusayan Ranger District is currently completing a travel management analysis and has worked with the Park Service on the south rim of Grand Canyon National Park to identify those back country roads leading into the National Park from the National Forest which might be closed to protect key features in the Park and those which should be kept open to provide public or administrative access. Similarly, the North Kaibab Ranger District in cooperation with the Park Service is beginning travel planning on the north side of the canyon. We anticipate decisions on both Ranger Districts by the end of 2010.

The Kaibab National Forest was a cooperating agency with the National Park in the development of the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan which potentially includes facilities on the National Forest.

The Kaibab National Forest and Grand Canyon National Park share a fire management organization. Last summer when the Ruby Complex was burning on both units, this cooperation helped us to work in close coordination under an emergency situation to effectively suppress multiple fires across the landscape.

The Kaibab National Forest works closely with local tribes in northern Arizona in the vicinity of the Grand Canyon to protect places which have traditional importance. In coordination with

these tribes, the Forest is in the process of nominating the Red Butte area, which is used for traditional plant gathering and ceremonies, as a Traditional Cultural Property.

We also understand that some members of the committee are concerned about potential impacts of uranium mining on the Kaibab National Forest in the vicinity of the Grand Canyon.

The Kaibab National Forest is currently analyzing a proposal, which would allow for the *exploration* for uranium on existing mining claims on the Tusayan Ranger District. We have completed the upfront public process where we hosted public meetings, met with key constituents and asked for initial concerns. We are now developing alternatives for an environmental impact statement. Additionally the Forest Service must now conduct a valid existing rights (VER) determination for the proponent's mining claims because the project area has been segregated from the mining laws as part of the proposed withdrawal. The Forest Service will not approve a Plan of Operations unless a VER can be established. If a decision is made to allow exploration to proceed, mitigation measures would be included; e.g., appropriate disposal of waste rock, road management, water and wildlife protection, etc. Should the company determine through exploration activities that it wants to move to the next phase and develop a mine on the site, an additional environmental analysis would be required, including opportunities for public comment.

In addition, the Forest Service is a cooperating agency with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), US Geological Survey (USGS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the NEPA process for a proposed withdrawal of certain lands near the Grand Canyon from the 1872 Mining Law. BLM is the lead agency in the development of the

environmental impact statement. Kaibab National Forest employees are participating in its development, including tribal consultation efforts. We have participated in three meetings with this group to discuss data collection and potential alternatives. We understand that final recommendations will be made to the Secretary of the Interior for a decision sometime in the spring of 2011. If the Secretary of the Interior makes a decision to withdraw all or part of the area from mineral development, it will not affect those who hold valid existing rights. However, it would preclude the filing of new claims.

Again we are honored to have the responsibility of managing these spectacular landscapes and resources. This concludes my prepared statement, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.