



US House of Representatives Natural Resources Subcommittee

Havasupai Tribe – Support for HR 1373 and Permanent Protection of the Grand Canyon Watershed from Mining

Introduction

My name is Carletta Tilousi and I am an elected Member of the Havasupai Tribal Council. I am here on behalf of the Havasupai Tribe to support HR 1373, which will permanently ban uranium mining and the establishment of new mining claims on federal lands located next to the Grand Canyon National Park and the Havasupai Indian Reservation. The Tribe supports the Bill because it will permanently protect one million acres of public lands from mining, including uranium mining that threatens Havasu Creek, which flows through our homeland and forms our famous waterfalls.

The Grand Canyon is a world famous natural wonder and a national treasure. Millions of people visit the Grand Canyon every year. Many Americans falsely believe that public lands like the Grand Canyon, and the federal lands surrounding the Grand Canyon, are already protected from development and mining. However, the 1872 Mining Law, that is still a valid US law, allows mining companies to stake mining claims and conduct mining operations on public lands.

Uranium mining has already poisoned and will continue to poison the Grand Canyon. It will poison the groundwater and aquifers that feed into the Colorado River. It will poison the land, the plants, the animals, the people that live there, and the visitors.

The Havasupai Tribe is one of the most remote communities in North America. We are located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon in Supai Village, which is accessible only by horse, helicopter, or 8-mile hike. My people have lived in the canyon for thousands of years. There are no roads or cars in our Village. Havasu Creek is a natural, spring-fed creek that flows through our Village year-round. It is our only source of water -- for our people, livestock, crops, and orchards. It creates beautiful blue-green waterfalls that are visited by thousands of tourists each year. It is the lifeblood of our Tribe. Havasupai means "People of the Blue Green Waters." The Tribe has fought for over thirty years to save our waters from current and proposed mining operations on federal lands next to the Grand Canyon National Park and the Havasupai Indian Reservation. Currently, a uranium mine, called Canyon Mine, is located above Supai Village in the Havasu Creek watershed and floodplain. In fact, our village has experienced several recent devastating floods.

The water from Havasu Creek flows into the Colorado River, which is the primary source of water for millions of people in large cities located downstream including Las Vegas, Phoenix, Tucson, and Los Angeles. The legacy of uranium mining has already caused radioactive contamination of the Colorado River, and additional contamination will only add to the problem.

The catastrophic effects of uranium mining are well-known to the Native Peoples of the southwest. There are hundreds of contaminated mining sites in Arizona and New Mexico that have been abandoned by mining companies. After decades of struggle, the Canyon Mine recently opened and has immediately caused unanticipated contamination. For example, reports show that the mining shaft pierced a perched aquifer causing approximately 5 to 9 gallons of water per minute to leak into the mine shaft since early 2017. In 2018 alone, 96,000,000 gallons of groundwater spilled into the mining shaft at Canyon Mine. The mining company must store the contaminated water onsite; however, they do not have enough capacity, so they spray the contaminated water into the air in an attempt to speed evaporation.

Canyon Mine sits above the largest aquifer in the southwest. This aquifer is the sole source of water for Havasu Creek, and Grand Canyon National Park. We share the same water.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, there is no safe level of human consumption of ionizing radiation -- the only safe level is zero. In total, as of 2018, there are 831 uranium mining claims on federal lands surrounding the Grand Canyon. These cannot be allowed to proceed.

The Havasupai Tribe is on the front line of any uranium mining contamination, but all people, all life downstream will be affected. For these reasons, the Havasupai Tribe requests your support for HR 1373 to permanently protect the natural resources of the Grand Canyon including the animals, plants, and the people that live there as well as the millions of visitors from around the world.