



July 15, 2011

Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary
Department of Interior

Re: Recent Grand Canyon Uranium Mining Decision

Dear Secretary Salazar:

As representatives of local and national sportsmen's organizations, we would like thank you for your recent visit to Grand Canyon National Park where you unveiled the six-month extension of the moratorium on uranium mining and your preference for *Alternative B* of the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). You, your staff, and the Bureau of Land Management here in Arizona, have been extremely helpful and obviously heard our concerns for fish and wildlife habitat. This is much appreciated.

Grand Canyon is not a treasure unto itself but from it flows the life blood of the desert southwest; water. Millions of desert dwellers receive water from the Colorado River including cities like Las Vegas, Phoenix and municipalities of Southern California. The renowned explorer Powell who first ventured down these Canyon walls first noted the "gold" of this region.

Besides being a critical water resource for inhabitants of the desert southwest, the Colorado River is home to a unique fishery that contains many native species including some which are threatened and endangered. Trout Unlimited and other conservation and angling organizations have contributed in the ongoing efforts to sustain these T&E species through volunteerism, funding and support. 15 miles of the upper river below Glen Canyon Dam is a world renowned trout fishing destination where angling opportunities abound and mitigation for T& E species shows the cooperation between anglers and the need for species biodiversity.

This biodiversity is the key to contributing to Grand Canyon's greatness and as a treasured National Park. From the amber snail in the Colorado River to the Boone & Crockett record breaking Mule Deer on the North Kaibab Plateau, fish and wildlife are the key elements in the Canyon's greatness and a leading economic driver in Northern Arizona. A recent study of the impact of hunting, fishing and wildlife watching released by the Arizona State University showed that wildlife related recreation in Arizona topped \$2.84 billion.

Our mutual conservation hero and past President, Theodore Roosevelt noted this consumptive and non-consumptive resource when establishing the Kaibab Game Refuge (Grand Canyon Game Refuge) in 1906. Roosevelt visited often to hunt the Kaibab's plentiful deer, mountain lions, and other game. Local sportsmen organizations such as the Arizona Deer Association, Arizona Antelope Foundation and the Arizona Elk Society have contributed to the success of their respective species of concern by liaising with the public on important issues, contributing time and funds to water catchments, fence removal and associated projects.

Uranium mining poses a significant threat to the aforementioned attributes of Grand Canyon National Park and surrounding wildlife habitat. With increased uranium mining the following threats are real:

- **Water Contamination** - The Environmental Protection Agency notes that uranium exposure through drinking water or eating fish could lead to bone cancer and impaired kidney function. Leakage from uranium mining breccia tubes into the water table could ultimately impact streams and tributaries running to the Colorado River. Evidence of this was compiled after a 1984 flash flood carried tons of uranium ore from six existing mines north of the Park down Kanab Creek and into the Park creating pollution impacts on tributaries of the Colorado River.

The big game species that occupy the region readily drink freestanding water. Dewatering in an arid region such as the project area would no doubt lead to direct mortality of wildlife. Contamination could have long-term detrimental consequences to herd fitness; clearly an undesirable outcome. Specifically mentioned in the DEIS is impairment of both watershed and stream function and contamination of surface water as a potential outcomes if uranium exploration and mining is allowed.

- **Habitat Fragmentation** – The USFWS recently reported that habitat fragmentation was the leading concern for wildlife which impacts their migration patterns and leads to food and water scarcity. While Uranium mines may not have a large footprint onsite the roads and utilities needed for these large scale operations lead to fragmentation of habitat and erosion of stream beds near roads. Species and habitat impacted would include winter range for mule deer from the Kaibab Plateau mule deer herd, one of the most famous and studied deer herds in the world. A long history of studies using radio telemetered mule deer have found that a substantial proportion of the deer that summer on the Kaibab Plateau winter in the north unit. In that these deer are gravid when they winter in the north parcel, habitat sufficiency is critical to long-term population survival. It is certain that increased disturbances from mineral exploration and mining would adversely affect the fecundity of this herd. This area is also home to pronghorn and desert bighorn, two socially and economical important wildlife species. Pronghorn are especially susceptible to habitat fragmentation as they are trepid creatures who remain in open areas and are often hampered in movement by fencing and artificial barriers. We would be remiss in not mentioning the California Condor and other endangered species including birds and raptors who make Grand Canyon their home.

Hunters, anglers and folks who enjoy wildlife watching come from a broad range of backgrounds and from a wide political spectrum. One thing that ties us all together, a truly American ideal, is the conservation of wildlife in wild-places. Wildlife, fisheries and the water that supports us are not partisan issues. Uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park is wholly unacceptable given the best science available and the potential impacts not only to our natural resources but to the economy of Northern Arizona and the communities that drink Colorado River water.

Once again thank you for your commitment to wildlife and water and for your decision on choosing *Alternative B* as the preferred alternative. We hope you will uphold this decision when the final EIS is issued this fall.

Respectfully,

Jim Stipe
Chair, Arizona Council of Trout Unlimited

Doug Beach
President, Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club

John Kolezar
President, Arizona Deer Association

Jim Akenson
Executive Director, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
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Shane Stewart
President, Arizona Antelope Foundation

Katie Distler Eckman
Board Chair, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Steve Clark
President, Arizona Elk Society

Tom Makin
President, Arizona Wildlife Federation

Tim Stephens
President, Anglers United Inc., Arizona

Cc:

David Hayes, Deputy Secretary of the Interior
Bob Abbey, BLM Director
Jim Kenna, State BLM Director
Larry Voyles, Director, Arizona Game and Fish Department
Honorable John McCain
Honorable Jon Kyl
Honorable Paul Gosar
Honorable Trent Franks
Honorable Ben Quayle
Honorable Ed Pastor

Honorable David Schweikert
Honorable Jeff Flake
Honorable Raul Grijalva
Honorable Gabrielle Giffords