

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
115th Congress Disclosure Form

Examining Consequences of America's Growing Dependence on Foreign Minerals
December 12, 2017

Havasupai Tribe- Comments
Carletta Tilousi, Havasupai Tribal Council Member

Introduction

Good afternoon, Committee Members. My name is Carletta Tilousi. I am from the Havasupai Tribe. We are located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon in Supai village. The Havasupai People have lived for centuries in Supai, an oasis filled with abundant fresh water and several world renowned waterfalls. Our way of life is being threatened by mining companies that stake uranium claims on federal lands located in the watershed right above Supai. As a member of the Havasupai Tribal Council, I am here to voice the Tribe's strong opposition to the proposed cancellation of the Northern Arizona Mineral Withdrawal ("Withdrawal") that will allow harmful uranium mining activities that threaten the Tribe.

The Havasupai People are very concerned about our main fresh water source, Havasu Creek, which flows right through the middle of our village. Havasu Creek is created by the Red Wall Muave Aquifer, which supplies water for us and downstream cities towns like Kingman, Phoenix, Tucson, and Las Vegas. The largest uranium ore deposits in the United States are all located above the Red Wall Muave Aquifer; therefore, the cancellation of the Withdrawal will open up the uranium ore located on Kaibab Forest Service Lands to uranium companies.

In 1882, by the stroke of a pen, the United States took away 1.6 million acres of the Tribe's aboriginal territory, including our ancestral sites. We were confined to a tiny 518 acre reservation, deep in the Grand Canyon. It is that land where Supai Village now sits—the most remote community in the lower 48 states, reachable only by 8-mile hike, horse, or helicopter.

The Tribe's economy depends on tourists who travel from all over the world to witness first-hand the spectacular beauty of our blue-green waterfalls. Those waterfalls, our drinking water, the water we use for our farms and water we survive on, all come from springs emerging from the towering red canyon walls. The springs are our sole source of water. The spring water flows directly from the Red Wall Mauve Aquifer that lies directly beneath the plateau and peaks south of Grand Canyon. Opening up this area to uranium and other mining would be tragic and an environmental nightmare.

What happens to that Red Wall Mauve Aquifer and springs happens to the Havasupai People. I am here to tell you that uranium contamination in the aquifer will not only poison my family, my Tribe, ancestral lands, and me, but also millions of people living downstream.

The Tribe has great reason to be concerned. Thousands of uranium mining claims, like so many vials of poison, threaten those lands that are the source of our water. Scientists do not yet fully understand how mining uranium will affect the groundwaters and watershed. The American people should not allow the continued give away of minerals on federal lands in the name of corporate profit at the expense of the Havasupai People.

Our Tribe is no stranger to what uranium contamination can do to human life. We are located downwind from the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, where the government allowed above ground nuclear bomb testing in the 1970's. Radioactive clouds drifted into our canyon and poisoned our families. During my lifetime I have witnessed many of my fellow tribal members die from cancer, including my father. The deaths of elders robbed us of our histories, and our stories. Children have been born with deformities and handicaps, robbing them, and us, of their futures. We know too well the trauma inflicted by nuclear ambitions including the harm that uranium mining has caused to our neighboring Tribes like the Hopi Tribe, the Navajo Nation,

and the Acoma Pueblo. In New Mexico my dear friend Dorothy Purley, died of cancer after working as a truck driver in a uranium mine. These are some of the reasons why the Havasupai Tribe fully supported the Withdrawal.

The Withdrawal was not a land grab. It did not impede an industry or harm America's readiness or reliance on foreign sources of uranium. The Withdrawal is about protecting the Grand Canyon, our lands, waters, animals, and human life. The Havasupai Tribe is in full support of keeping the Withdrawal in place, including its mandates for to further the much needed studies surrounding the Grand Canyon region.

There is too much at stake to gamble with the safety of the Grand Canyon watershed. The 40 million people who depend on water from the Colorado River should not have their water sources threatened by uranium mining. As evidence of the importance of the Colorado River watershed, the City of Flagstaff, Coconino County, the Town of Tusayan, all strongly advocated in support of the Withdrawal.

Many human lives depend on the Colorado River. There is no need to allow uranium mining around the Grand Canyon because the demand for uranium has shrunk to historic lows. Energy Fuels, the Canadian company currently operating the Canyon Mine located at the entrance of the Grand Canyon National Park, indicated that the mine will not open until the price of uranium increases.

Contrary to industry claims, increasing uranium production could actually *pose a threat* to the national security interests of the United States. These mineral claims are largely controlled by foreign corporations, and the majority of the uranium taken from the Colorado Plateau has been used for foreign export to nuclear power plants in Asia and Europe.

Uranium mining has never added any lasting value to the economy of our region but instead has only left hundreds of highly contaminated sites and trails of despair. The Grand Canyon is what drives our tourism-based economy. Expanded uranium mining near the Canyon will only discourage tourism. The mines in full production only employ a few specialized workers, and when the ore is mined out, they move on.

Any change to the Withdrawal should occur only after proper consultation with Tribes that live in the Grand Canyon region and are affected by the decision, as required by Executive Order 13175. In addition, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides, at Article 19, that “States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.” The United States has officially voiced its support for that Declaration.

The Havasupai Tribe respectfully request Secretary Zinke and President Trump to leave the Withdrawal intact for the future protection of our waters and ancestral lands. If the U.S.’s support for the Declaration means anything, if democracy means anything, it should mean that the voices of Havasupai people should be heard, and that the Grand Canyon should be protected for all humanity. We are the Havasu Baaja, People of the Blue Green Waters. Mah.