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Conservation Groups Challenge Kempthorne to Protect Grand Canyon and Enforce Uranium Mining Ban

Administration Continues Uranium Development near Grand Canyon Defying Congress, Laws and Ignoring Contamination Threats

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz— The Center for Biological Diversity, Grand Canyon Trust and Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter today filed [suit](#) against Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne for authorizing uranium exploration near Grand Canyon National Park in defiance of a congressional resolution prohibiting such activities across 1 million acres of public lands in watersheds surrounding the Park.

On June 25th the U.S. House of Representative's Committee on Natural Resources [voted](#) 20-2 in favor of a [resolution](#) that requires the Secretary to withdraw public lands surrounding Grand Canyon from new uranium claims and exploration. The Secretary, acting through the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management, has defied the resolution and continued to initiate and authorize new uranium exploration within the withdrawal area north of Grand Canyon. The suit claims that in so doing, the Secretary violated the Federal Land Management and Policy Act, National Environmental Policy Act and other laws.

"The Secretary has defied laws and Congress to continue uranium development that threatens the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River," said Taylor McKinnon, public lands program director for the Center for Biological Diversity "Short of putting the Secretary before a judge, nothing — not laws, not Congress, and not the Grand Canyon itself — will impede the Bush administration's accommodation of industry on our public lands."

Recent spikes in the price of uranium have caused thousands new uranium claims, dozens of exploratory drilling projects, and movement to open several uranium mines on public lands immediately north and south of Grand Canyon. Concerns about surface- and ground-water contamination of Grand Canyon National Park and the Colorado River have been expressed by Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano; the Los Angeles Water District; the Southern Nevada Water Authority; the Arizona Game and Fish Department; the Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai and Kaibab Paiute nations; and Coconino County.

"Congressmen Nick Rahall, Raúl Grijalva, and other members of the Committee on Natural Resources recognized the immediate threat that uranium mining posed to Colorado River watersheds and took the lead in demanding bold, emergency action," said Roger Clark with the Grand Canyon Trust. "It's unacceptable to allow this Administration to abuse their power by ignoring the resolution and putting the Grand Canyon, our nation's most beloved national park, at risk."

Emergency withdrawals have been enacted four times prior to this, most recently in 1981 and 1983 by the late Arizona Congressman Mo Udall and the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee to halt public lands mineral- and energy-leasing programs pursued by Interior Secretary James Watt.

"Grand Canyon is a national treasure and something we should protect not just for today, but for future generations," said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter. "It is irresponsible for this administration to sacrifice this area, threaten the Park, and risk the water supply for millions of people, all for a few narrow special interests."

In March, Congressman Raul Grijalva [introduced the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act](#), legislation that would permanently withdraw from mineral extraction the same 1 million acres encompassed by the Committee resolution.

In April, the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, and Grand Canyon Trust won a [preliminary injunction](#) against the Kaibab National Forest for allowing the first of five exploration projects south of Grand Canyon to proceed under a categorical exclusion from detailed environmental review.

In that suit's [settlement last week](#) the Kaibab National Forest and British mining firm VANE Minerals must repeal the exploration project and prepare a full environmental impact statement should they choose to propose it a second time.

Today's case against Kempthorne is being argued by attorneys Marc Fink of the Center for Biological Diversity, Neil Levine of Grand Canyon Trust, and Roger Flynn of Western Mining Action Project.

Click links below to view the following documents:
[Conservationist's lawsuit against Kempthorne](#)

[Map of Uranium Exploration Authorized in Violation of Emergency Withdrawal](#)
[Map of Uranium Claims, Seeps and Springs in Withdrawal Area](#)
[Letter by Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano](#)
[Letter by Los Angeles Water District](#)
[Coconino County Grand Canyon Uranium Resolution](#)
[Testimony of Dr. Larry Stevens](#)
[Testimony of Dr. Abe Springer](#)
[Testimony of Robert Arnberger, former Grand Canyon National Park superintendent](#)
[Testimony of Roger Clark](#)
[Testimony of Chris Shuey](#)
[Supplement to Chris Shuey Testimony](#)
[Letter dated July 15th from Department of Interior](#)
[Letter dated July 16th by Congressman Rahall](#)

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