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Salazar Calls Two-Year ‘Time-Out’ from New Mining Claims on Arizona Strip Watershed near Grand Canyon National Park

Department will evaluate more extended withdrawal of lands from new mining claims

WASHINGTON, D.C. – After carefully considering the issue of uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has decided to segregate nearly 1 million acres of federal lands in the Arizona Strip for two years while the Department evaluates whether to withdraw these lands from new mining claims for an additional 20 years.

“I am calling a two-year ‘Time-Out’ from all new mining claims in the Arizona Strip near the Grand Canyon because we have a responsibility to ensure we are developing our nation’s resources in a way that protects local communities, treasured landscapes, and our watersheds,” said Secretary Salazar. “Over the next two years, we will gather the best science and input from the public, members of Congress, tribes, and stakeholders, and we will thoughtfully evaluate whether these lands should be withdrawn from new mining claims for a longer period of time.”

The segregated lands include 633,547 acres managed by Interior’s Bureau of Land Management and 360,002 acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Department of the Interior is the federal agency charged with segregating U.S. public lands for possible withdrawal. The lands are within portions of the Grand Canyon watershed next to Grand Canyon National Park in northern Arizona and contain significant environmental and cultural resources as well as substantial uranium deposits.

An iconic American landscape and World Heritage Site, Grand Canyon National Park encompasses 1.2 million acres on the Colorado Plateau. The park, which draws 4.4 million visitors each year, is home to numerous rare, endemic and specially protected plant and animal species and contains vast archeological resources and sites of spiritual and cultural importance to American Indians. The Colorado River and its tributaries that flow through the watersheds of Grand Canyon National Park supply water to agricultural,

industrial, and municipal users, including the cities of Tucson, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

Under the Secretary's conventional withdrawal procedures, the two-year segregation has essentially the same effect as a withdrawal -- it would prohibit new mining claims in the designated areas. Neither the segregation nor any withdrawal, however, would prohibit ongoing or future mining exploration or extraction operations on valid pre-existing claims. Those activities might proceed during segregation and any withdrawal. About 10,600 mining claims are located in the proposed withdrawal area and several current uranium mining operations await State of Arizona environmental permits. Neither the segregation nor the proposed withdrawal would prohibit any other authorized uses on these lands.

A notice published in today's *Federal Register* initiates a 90-day public comment period on the proposed withdrawal and segregation. Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, lands proposed for withdrawal are immediately segregated for up to two years during which a decision on the proposed withdrawal may be made.

During the two-year segregation, studies and analyses will be conducted to determine if the lands should be withdrawn to protect the area from new mining claims. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, this process includes participation by the public, tribes, environmental groups, industry, state and local government, as well as other stakeholders.

These efforts will be undertaken under the leadership of the Bureau of Land Management in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Park Service and will be used in support of a final decision on the withdrawal.

By law, the Department can withdraw these lands for a maximum of 20 years. Only Congress can initiate a permanent withdrawal.

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