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### Federal Plan Announced to Protect Grand Canyon From Uranium Mining

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, Ariz.— The Obama administration today announced a draft plan to protect 1 million acres of public land around Grand Canyon National Park from new uranium mining. Conservationists and tribal leaders hailed the move, citing thousands of new mining claims threatening Grand Canyon’s watersheds, fragile seeps and springs, American Indian sacred sites, critical wildlife habitat and the region’s tourism-based economy.

“Tourism, not mining, is the mainstay of our region’s economy,” said Roger Clark with the Grand Canyon Trust. “BLM is grossly inflating revenue projections for uranium mining and fails to reveal that most revenues go to Utah or overseas—not Arizona. Uranium mining imposes long-term health risks on local communities and is costing federal taxpayers billions of dollars to clean the mess from its last boom. We simply cannot afford another round of this deadly legacy.”

On July 21, 2009, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar issued a two-year “segregation order” banning new mining claims across 1 million acres of public lands around the world-famous national park. Today’s draft environmental impact statement proposes a 20-year “mineral withdrawal” across the same 1 million-acre area, banning new claims and blocking new mining on existing, unproven claims.

“This is an important step in protecting the people, the water and the wildlife of the greater Grand Canyon area,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director of the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter. “Now all those who support protecting Grand Canyon — tribal leaders, local communities, water districts, conservationists — must work to make sure the final decision for these lands is as protective as possible.”

Uranium pollution already plagues the Grand Canyon region. Proposals for new mining have prompted protests, litigation and proposed legislation. Scientists, tribal and local governments and businesses have voiced opposition. Dozens of new mines threaten to industrialize iconic and regionally sacred wildlands, destroy wildlife habitat and permanently pollute or deplete aquifers feeding Grand Canyon’s biologically rich springs.

“The world would never forgive the permanent pollution of Grand Canyon’s precious aquifers and springs,” said Taylor McKinnon, public lands campaigns director at the

Center for Biological Diversity. “The only sure way to prevent pollution of the Grand Canyon is to prevent uranium mining.”

The release of the draft plan will start a 45-day public comment period. Public meetings are slated for early March in Arizona and Utah. A final decision on the proposed protections is expected this summer.