

Arizona Faith Network • Arizona Trail Association • Arizona Wildlife Federation • Center for Biological Diversity • Chispa Arizona • Coalition to Protect America's National Parks • Earthjustice • Environmental Defense Action Fund • Grand Canyon Trust • Hispanic Access Foundation • Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors • League of Conservation Voters • National Parks Conservation Association • Physicians for Social Responsibility - AZ Chapter • Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter • Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership • The Wilderness Society • Vet Voice Foundation • Western Resource Advocates • Wild Arizona

May 31, 2022 (Updated June 6th, 2022)

Chairwoman Catherine Cortez Masto
Subcommittee on Public Lands Forests and Mining
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Cortez Masto and Esteemed Members of the Subcommittee:

The following groups support the timely passage of the Grand Canyon Protection Act (S. 387), jointly introduced by both of Arizona's Senators—Senator Kyrsten Sinema and Senator Mark Kelly: Arizona Faith Network, Arizona Trail Association, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, Environmental Defense Action Fund, Grand Canyon Trust, Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors, National Parks Conservation Association, Physicians for Social Responsibility - Arizona Chapter, Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, The Wilderness Society, Western Resource Advocates, and Wild Arizona.

Our groups proudly stand with members and leaders of many Indigenous Tribes and Nations, including from the Havasupai Tribe. Tribes have called the Grand Canyon home since time immemorial and have long opposed uranium mining on their homelands and the significant harm uranium has disproportionately brought to Indigenous communities of the Southwest. Together with a broad coalition of business owners, faith groups, local government leaders, military veterans, hunting and fishing groups, river runners and others,¹ we oppose uranium mining

¹ According to Colorado College's State of the Rockies Project, 2020 Conservation in the West Poll, 77% of respondents in Arizona "oppose allowing new uranium mining claims on existing public lands next to Grand Canyon National Park." Across all states polled (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, and WY), opposition was 71%.

https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2020/2020-conservation-in-the-west-poll-data/2020%20Western%20States%20-%20Interview%20Schedule_COMBINED.pdf page 16.

near the Grand Canyon and call for the ultimate and urgent passage of the Grand Canyon Protection Act (GCPA).

The GCPA would permanently ban new uranium mining on certain public lands in Arizona adjacent to Grand Canyon National Park—acknowledging the extraordinary threats that mining inherently poses to water quality and quantity in a critical watershed that is already experiencing stress due to severe drought and climate change. Groundwater is also the primary, and often sole source of water in northern Arizona. Passage of the GCPA would safeguard a landscape that is sacred to at least eleven Indigenous Tribes and Nations, many of whom already experience a continuing legacy of deadly uranium pollution. On the Navajo Nation alone, there are more than 500 abandoned uranium mines that have yet to be cleaned up.

In 2012, after an extensive public process, the Department of the Interior announced a 20-year ban on new mines and mining claims (the maximum time allowed administratively) on about one million acres of federally managed land in Arizona adjacent to, and hydrologically and ecologically connected to, the Grand Canyon. The GCPA proposes to make that temporary ban permanent.

Scientific research done to-date is limited—in large part by funding and the vast, remote, and complex nature of the region. But research that has been done underscores the highly fractured and complex geology of the lands adjacent to Grand Canyon National Park. **Within this hydrologic system, groundwater travel times and flow directions vary and as a result, a mine can be connected to the Grand Canyon and its life-sustaining waters whether it's right on the rim or miles from it.** What's more, cleanup of any contamination that does occur in this type of groundwater system would be unlikely and would at best result in further dewatering of fragile water resources.

The National Congress of American Indians has passed Resolution #REN-19-001 “Opposing Mining On Public Lands and Around Grand Canyon without Tribal Nations’ Free Prior and Informed Consent.”² The resolution states, “the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) supports the passage of the Grand Canyon Protection Act to ban mining activities on federal lands that impact tribal natural and cultural resources unless tribal nations have given their free prior and informed consent;” This and other Tribal resolutions passed in support of the GCPA are attached to this letter.

Mining uranium near the Grand Canyon also makes no sense from a national security or economic perspective. In all cases, any potential reward is

²National Congress of American Indians passed Resolution #REN-19-001 “Opposing Mining On Public Lands and Around Grand Canyon without Tribal Nations’ Free Prior and Informed Consent.” 2019.

https://www.ncai.org/attachments/Resolution_INNtURqMEiytKjvxeOmdtHNMlaPWyaEvGWBmCyxSOuWMuiFLXvQ_REN-19-001%20FINAL.pdf

outweighed by the risk that uranium mining poses to the Grand Canyon and surrounding region, and to the people and economies that depend upon these lands and waters. The facts are these:

- Just 0.2% of identified US uranium resources are located in the proposed ban area.³
- Mining uranium from breccia pipes via underground mining is a relatively expensive form of recovery, especially compared to in-situ recovery methods employed elsewhere in the country.⁴
- When operating, breccia pipe uranium mines are short-lived and therefore, can offer only temporary employment for relatively few people.⁵
- Mining contamination and/or groundwater depletion would risk the thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars that the Grand Canyon currently brings to gateway communities.⁶

The Senate has the opportunity to take the long view and permanently safeguard the Grand Canyon region from irreparable harm, to honor the wishes of the many Tribes and Tribal Nations to whom these lands are culturally significant, and to protect the precious and increasingly limited water resources this region holds, along with the regional economy the Grand Canyon supports.

Sincerely,

/s/

Amber Reimondo
Energy Director
Grand Canyon Trust
Flagstaff, Arizona

³ Grand Canyon Trust spatial analysis (<https://www.grandcanyontrust.org/identified-uranium-resources-united-states>) using data from: https://www.usgs.gov/centers/cersc/science/integrated-uranium-resource-and-environmental-assessment?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects

⁴ “In [the] USA, ISL is seen as the most cost effective . . . method of mining, and other experience supports this.” <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/mining-of-uranium/in-situ-leach-mining-of-uranium.aspx>

⁵ For example, Canyon Mine, recently renamed Pinyon Plain Mine, is expected to operate for 10 years or less. See page 10 of the mine’s plan of operations https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd475369.pdf

⁶ In 2019, “Grand Canyon National Park attracted nearly 6 million visitors who spent more than \$890 million, supporting 11,806 jobs and generating a \$1.1 billion total economic output.” <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/national-park-visitor-spending-generates-economic-impact-more-41-billion#:~:text=Last%20year%2C%20Grand%20Canyon%20National,who%20spent%20an%20es-timated%20%246%2C208%2C000>

/s/
David Spence, MD
Chairman, Board of Directors
AZ Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility
Flagstaff, Arizona

/s/
Taylor McKinnon
Senior Public Lands Campaigner
Center for Biological Diversity
Flagstaff, Arizona

/s/
Scott Miller
Senior Regional Director, Southwest
The Wilderness Society
Denver, Colorado

/s/
Sandy Bahr
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/s/
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Maite Arce
President & CEO
Hispanic Access Foundation

/s/

Michael B. Murray
Chair, Executive Council
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Washington, D.C.

/s/

Alex Taurel
Conservation Program Director
League of Conservation Voters
Charlottesville, Virginia

/s/

Dulce Juarez
State Co-Director
Chispa Arizona

Enclosures: (Updated June 6th to include June 4th ITAA Letter)

1. National Congress of American Indians Resolution #REN-19-001
2. Inter Tribal Association of Arizona Resolution #0121
3. Inter Tribal Association of Arizona Letter of Support, June 4, 2022
4. Hopi Resolution A.I. #023-2019/H-025-2019
5. Havasupai Resolution #12-19
6. City of Flagstaff Resolution #2019-13
7. Coconino County Letter of Support, Feb. 17, 2021
8. Coconino County Resolution 2019-08