Uranium Mining Fact Sheet

Overview –

On July 20, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar issued a two-year segregation order limiting new mining claims on approximately one million acres of federal public lands adjacent to the Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP) in the Kanab Creek area and in the House Rock Valley managed by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and in the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest. The proposed withdrawal would limit mining to existing, proven claims on these lands. Since issuing the segregation order in 2009, the Department of the Interior (DOI) has been evaluating whether to withdraw the lands from mining for an additional 20 years. On February 18, 2011 the DOI released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Background –

Thousands of new mining claims have been filed on Forest Service and BLM lands within the proposed withdrawal areas over the past five years. The majority of the new claims are within ten miles of the Park. More than 5000 claims have been filed within the proposed withdrawal area.

The increase in new uranium mining claims being filed adjacent to GCNP is due to the price increase in uranium ore, which was $7 per pound in 2005 and has risen to a current price of $60 per pound (July 2010). The price increase is driven by questionable perceptions of increased demand for uranium as dozens of proposed new nuclear power plants are tentatively scheduled for construction over the next decade.

Economic Impact –

Tourism, not mining, has been the mainstay of the region's economy. Northern Arizona University conducted the Grand Canyon National Park Northern Arizona Tourism Study in April 2005. The study found that visitation to the Grand Canyon provided $687 million annually in direct, indirect and induced revenues into the local economy, and employs 12,000 FTEs direct, indirect and induced. The Canyon averages five million visitors annually making it the key regional economic engine.

Studies conducted on behalf of the Arizona Office of Tourism to determine tourism benefits in Sedona, Verde Valley and Flagstaff, from 2005 to 2009, support the findings of the 2005 GCNP study. These studies all reflect that a large percentage of visitors to these communities also visit the Grand Canyon (Example: 70 percent of Flagstaff visitors and 62 percent of Sedona visitors also visit the Grand Canyon).

Benefit to the local tax base will be minimal since the mines are located on public lands.

Hard rock minerals, such as uranium mined on federal lands do not pay royalties to American taxpayers. This is unlike oil, natural gas and coal industries that pay royalties to the taxpayers for these minerals extracted from public lands.

Canadian-owned Denison Mine Corp and Vane Minerals are the mining companies that have filed a majority of the new claims. South Korea's utility, Korea Electric Power, owns 20 percent of Denison. Thousands of pounds of enriched uranium will be exported by Denison to Korea

Electric Power. In addition to uranium leaving the U.S., corporate profits that are derived from mining will also leave Arizona and the United States.

Safety Concerns/Issues –

There is a real potential for uranium contamination to occur in the creeks, seeps and other tributaries that supply water to GCNP and that flow into the Colorado River. National Park Service has an advisory on its website advising visitors not to drink or bath in the Little Colorado River, Kanab Creek, Horn Creek as well as other waterways due to excessive radionuclide contamination.

Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles and Southern Nevada Water Authority have voiced their serious concerns about possible contamination of the Colorado River if uranium mining is permitted around the Grand Canyon and the potential devastating effect it could have on the 25 million people in Arizona, Nevada and southern California that rely on water from the Colorado River for drinking and agriculture.

The extracted ore will be transported by trucks to the mill site in Blanding, Utah. Ore will be trucked from the south rim on State Route 64/180 to Interstate 40 to State Route 89 and across the Navajo Nation to Blanding. Traffic on State Routes 64/180 and 89 is already congested. The addition of haul trucks will further exacerbate congestion and contribute to more hazardous driving conditions. In the event of an accident involving an ore truck the roadways could be closed for long periods of time in order to get hazardous materials properly secured and cleaned up.

Uranium Supply –

The United States has 104 operating nuclear power plants that supply 20 percent of the nation's electricity. Uranium is the primary fuel for these plants and 50 to 55 million pounds are required annually for operation.

Domestic supply of uranium in 2007 provided 4 million pounds (8%), and foreign sources such as Australia provided the remaining 47 million pounds. Total uranium purchases by the U.S. have decreased in the past six years. Some of this is due to changes in uranium prices, international agreements, and use of secondary sources such as domestic stockpiles and dismantling of nuclear warheads for energy production.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IEAE) the United States has 6 percent of all uranium reserves in the world, with most of the U.S. uranium ore located in sandstone and breccia-complex deposits found primarily in western U.S., with the largest deposits found in Wyoming and New Mexico. The breccia pipes in Arizona represent less than 1 percent of total U.S. supplies.

Over 75 percent of the foreign sources for uranium for the past five years have come from three countries: Australia (22%), Canada (31%) and Russia (24%).

Existing Uranium Mines and New Claims -

Renewed interest in uranium is again threatening to industrialize the Grand Canyon and the region.

Three existing mines are being readied to reopen (Pinenut, EZ, and Canyon mines) and the Arizona 1 reopened in 2009. Within a few years the industry intends to be operating dozens of mines located less than ten miles from the Grand Canyon National Park.

Uranium Mining History in the West –

Uranium mining occurred from the 1960's through the 1980's on the Arizona Strip, Grand Canyon Rim and the surrounding tribal lands. The legacy is still being felt today where abandoned mine sites continue to pollute and contaminate air, water and soil.

The Orphan Mine located on the south rim of the Grand Canyon closed in 1969. National Park Service contractors in 2009 removed the Orphan Mine's surface structure within the fenced industrial area adjacent to Powell Point, a popular Canyon overlook. The cost of this clean up is expected to exceed $15 million and taxpayers are paying for the clean up.

The toxic Atlas uranium mill tailings pile abandoned in 1984 by the company in Moab, Utah will cost taxpayers $1 billion to remove from the Colorado River flood plain. The Atlas Mill is one of hundreds of places where uranium mining has left a poisonous footprint on our landscape, leaving 16 million tons of radioactive mill waste leaking into the Colorado River, the drinking water supply for 25 million people downstream.

Next Steps –

Secretary Ken Salazar should extend the existing, temporary withdrawal affecting new mining on the nearly one million acres of public lands surrounding the Grand Canyon for twenty years. More time is needed to find a long-term solution.

From an economic standpoint, the potential impact of uranium mining in northern Arizona is a drop in the bucket compared to benefits derived from tourism, which will be put at risk if the region is industrialized.

Elected officials, business and community leaders need to contact Secretary Salazar and let him know this issue is critical to the long-term economic viability of the region and to the protection and preservation of the Grand Canyon for future generations. Bottom line, uranium mining adjacent to Grand Canyon is simply not worth the risk.

Comments may be submitted electronically to: azasminerals@blm.gov or by mail to Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal Project, ATTN: Scott Florence, District Manager, Bureau of Land Management Arizona Strip District Office, 345 East Riverside Drive, St. George, UT