

Canyon's 'guardians' press for protections

by **Matthew Putesoy** - Jul. 25, 2009

My Turn

The Grand Canyon is a national treasure, inviting 5 million people every year to explore and be inspired by its beauty. To the Havasuw 'Baaja, who have lived in the region for many hundreds of years, it is sacred.

As the "guardians of the Grand Canyon," we strenuously object to mining for uranium here. It is a threat to the health of our environment and tribe, our [tourism](#)-based economy, and our religion. Thank you, Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar, for announcing a two-year moratorium on new mining claims in the 1 million acres of lands around Grand Canyon [National Park](#).

But existing claims, such as those pursued by Canadian-based Denison Mines Corp., still threaten the animals, air, drinking water and people of this region. Denison, which has staked 110 claims around the Grand Canyon, is seeking groundwater-aquifer permits that would allow it to reopen the Canyon Mine, near Red Butte on the South Rim, as well as two other mining sites.

Uranium mining has been associated with contamination of ground or surface water. Here, mining could poison the aquifer, which extends for 5,000 square miles under the Coconino Plateau, and serves as drinking water for our tribe and neighboring communities.

As I told Congress recently, if our water were polluted, we could not relocate to Phoenix or someplace else and still survive as the Havasupai Tribe. We are the Grand Canyon. Thanks to Arizona Congressman Raul Grijalva for introducing the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act. We urge U.S. Sen. John McCain to introduce it in the Senate.

Additionally, air and water pollution and the development associated with mining operations could deter [tourists](#), the lifeblood of our economy. Visitors

come here to hike, camp, relax at our lodge and enjoy the Havasu, Mooney, Beaver, and Navajo falls, which are among the best-loved and most-photographed [waterfalls](#) on Mother Earth.

Most importantly, Red Butte, where Denison Mines intends to reopen a mine, is a traditional site sacred to the Havasuw 'Baaja. Located in the Kaibab [National Forest](#), Red Butte is known as Wii'i Gdwiisa, meaning "clenched-fist mountain."

As longtime Havasupai leader Rex Tilousi says, "Red Butte is the lungs of our Grandmother Canyon." My people have used these traditional Havasupai religious areas for centuries.

Instead of allowing the destruction of our national treasure, we are asking the federal government to work with Havasupai Tribe to protect Red Butte and all of the lands on and around the Grand Canyon from further mining activities. This natural wonder is irreplaceable and demands our shared action and protection for those living now, and those yet to be born.

Members of the public are invited to join the Havasupai today for a free public concert at 6 p.m. and for a public forum on uranium mining and protecting our sacred lands on Sunday at the base of Red Butte. For more information go online to: [arizona.sierra club.org/](#).

Matthew Putesoy is vice chairman of the Havasupai Tribe.

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2009/07/25/20090725putesoy25.html>