

**TESTIMONY TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

“On the Edge: Challenges Facing Grand Canyon National Park.”

**Shrine of the Ages, Grand Canyon, AZ
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My name is Bill Hedden. I am the executive director of the Grand Canyon Trust, and also president of the North Rim Ranch, which operates an 850,000 acre cattle ranch on public lands adjacent to the Grand Canyon’s North Rim. Thank you Chairmen Grijalva and Napolitano for choosing to convene this field hearing at Grand Canyon National Park.

My organization’s mission is to help protect and restore the Grand Canyon and the surrounding federal lands upstream throughout the watershed of the Colorado River. For twenty five years, we have been here on the ground working to assure that our children can know this special place healthy and intact, as it was passed down to us.

Today we are grappling with the question of whether this matchless canyon landscape should be developed for private gain or kept whole so that it might continue to provide solace and inspiration to people everywhere; to decide whether, in the thirsty Southwest, the water of the Colorado River is more precious than uranium. These are problems that recur in every generation. When President Benjamin Harrison established the Grand Canyon Forest Reserve in 1893, his proclamation precluded mining. Local residents submitted a protest claiming that the Grand Canyon was "strictly mineral country."

When the idea of designating the Canyon a national park arose shortly thereafter, the editor of the *Williams Sun* called it a "fiendish and diabolical scheme," opining that whoever fathered such an idea must have been "suckled by a sow and raised by an idiot....The fate of Arizona depends exclusively upon the development of her mineral resources."

Time has shown that the boosters are not always right. Tourism, not mining, has been the mainstay of our economy for more than a century. Today, visitation to the Grand Canyon provides more than \$600 million in annual revenues and wages to our region.

Of course, the miners had a heyday during the Cold War, covering the Four-Corners region with thousands of uranium mines and scores of mills. I would like to thank Chairman Napolitano for her leadership in cleaning up the Atlas uranium mill, which for decades has leached radioactive contamination into the Colorado River near Moab, Utah. I worked in that mill and often think about friends who were taken from their young families by rare and aggressive cancers, or about others crushed by mine cave-ins. These things are not abstractions in this part of the world.

The Atlas mill is one of hundreds of places where the mining industry left a toxic legacy on our landscape. It was closed in 1984 when federal subsidies for uranium stopped, leaving 16 million tons of radioactive mill wastes leaking into the drinking water for 25 million people downstream, and leaving the taxpayers holding the bag for the \$1 billion clean-up cost.

Today, uranium mining is again threatening to industrialize our region. High uranium prices have induced a modern frenzy, including 10,000 new claims staked within watersheds that drain directly into the Grand Canyon. Despite Secretary Salazar's timeout, last December a Canadian-owned company began hauling uranium ore from its Arizona 1 Mine located in the Kanab Creek watershed and within eyesight of the Park. Much of the uranium from this operation is bound for Korea.

Several other mines are being readied to open. Within a few years, the industry intends to be operating dozens of mines located less than ten miles from Grand Canyon National Park. At full production, the Arizona Department of Mines anticipates at least six active mines and six under reclamation each year for decades. More than 100 mines will be punched into the Grand Canyon's watersheds.

Each new mine is a fenced industrial zone the size of twenty football fields. Its development includes deep mining shafts, heavy equipment, tailing piles, retention ponds, "head rig" elevators, warehouses, employee housing, electric motors, and diesel generators. Numerous new roads and high-voltage power lines are built to serve each mine. Dust and noise from dozens of daily haul trucks will shroud the Grand Canyon's remote backcountry and congest already crowded highways leading into the Park. One of our nation's most treasured national parks will be surrounded by an industrial zone.

The U.S. Geological Survey recently released studies that found radioactive contamination in every "reclaimed" uranium mine that they sampled. These initial findings confirm that mining uranium within Grand Canyon watersheds risks permanently polluting groundwater. Surface samples taken from a mine within the Park and others along its perimeter showed contamination. Samples taken from water sumps below mining shafts were highly radioactive, with levels at one site exceeding legal limits by more than 1,000 times.

The mining industry claims that modern mining isn't like it was during the previous boom. And yet the Bureau of Land Management permitted the Arizona 1 Mine to reopen with operations just as they had been in 1988. The ore from that mine is being milled near Blanding, Utah in the old White Mesa mill. Fed up with reassurances that "we'll do it right this time," the Navajo, Havasupai and Hualapai nations have all banned uranium mining on their lands.

The Southwest is uranium country and we know from experience that uranium will be mined here if federal subsidies for nuclear power continue. But the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act would stop the senseless sacrifice of a world treasure for small amounts of the yellow metal. The USGS has estimated that the area proposed for withdrawal in Chairman Grijalva's bill contains only about 12% of the undiscovered uranium in northern Arizona. That small act of forbearance would preserve the Canyon's silence, clean air, dark night skies, and wildlife and it would prevent harm that we could not repair to the aquifers that feed fragile springs and streams within the Canyon itself. It would protect the Colorado River from further contamination and reduce the need for costly cleanups.

It is our generation's turn to continue the wise work of protecting this place for the future generations to whom it rightly belongs. The Watersheds Protection Act will complete a small zone of sanity sheltering the Grand Canyon for all time from whatever new mining frenzies may threaten to defile it.