

Testimony before the Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands: "Community Impacts of Proposed Uranium Mining Near Grand Canyon National Park." Friday March 28, 2008  
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I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands for the invitation to testify before them. My name is Charlie Vaughn, Chairman of the Hualapai Tribe of northwestern Arizona.

The issue of Uranium mining has been proposed to my tribe several times, most recently less than one month ago. It is our understanding that the price for Uranium has been climbing due to the interests of countries like China who are utilizing uranium as an energy source. This demand has stirred the interests of mining companies who are prepared to take advantage of law that was created before our country had developed an environmental consciousness that mirrored that of the American Indian.

It is this consciousness that has prompted my tribe to not consider Uranium as an energy alternative that we should explore to provide economic benefit to our tribe. Although we understand that this industry may provide clean energy for the world market it is the aftermath of this endeavor that is of grave concern to my people.

We do not want to see the by products of Uranium production stored in places like Yucca Mountain for the remainder of our lifetimes and leave others with the concern of the potential harm this would bring to our progenitors Grandfather Water and Mother Earth.

We as an indigenous people are taught to respect and hold sacred those elements that provide the essence of our life. It is out of this belief that we share our concerns for proposed Uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park.

The Grand Canyon itself was formed by a Hualapai Warrior in our creation stories; to grant impunity to mining companies through antiquated law that only serves to revitalize an industry that was in part developed in the Southwest at the expense of the lives of indigenous people is an affront to those people who were subjected to the greed of an industry that had no regard for their safety or their health.

This land is sacred to the Hualapai who are concerned that restraint will not be exercised in considering this issue. It is our concern that the proliferation of mining activity near the Grand Canyon may affect the water that flows underground and issues at places like Havasu Falls.

In order to protect those resources that occur near or within the Grand Canyon, hydrology surveys must be conducted to ensure that resources are protected.

It is our concern that potential mining sites may compromise traditional and cultural sites that are Hualapai. In order to ensure that our beliefs and life ways are protected we must be included in the discussion of proposed agreements between mining companies and the Federal Government. We must be able to speak to the protection of these sites through these agreements and ensure compliance with Federal Laws such as NEPA. These proposed agreements must be subjected to tribal review and approval before any activity proceeds.

It is our position that environmental and tribal concerns must be fully addressed as a part of any proposal to mine near the Grand Canyon.

Furthermore, we must be assured that mine tailings stockpiled on a mining site will not produce an environmental consequence?

It is imperative that this subcommittee also consider whether or not antiquated laws will enable companies to explore opportunity near or within the Grand Canyon, thereby, compromising the foresight that President Roosevelt had when he spoke to its creation.

It is a grave concern that the intrinsic value that is imbued within the Hualapai People for the Grand Canyon cannot be adequately stated in this testimony, suffice it to say that we do not want to see the land in proximity to the Grand Canyon scarred by additional roads or mining sites that will be a vestige of the beauty that once was for several generations to come.

Once again I thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Hualapai Tribe.