

TESTIMONY  
OF  
SUPERVISOR LIZ ARCHULETA  
COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND  
PUBLIC LANDS  
“H.R. 644, THE GRAND CANYON WATERSHEDS  
PROTECTION ACT OF 2009”

JULY 21, 2009

Chairman Grijalva and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest and Public Lands, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on H.R. 644, the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act of 2009. My name is Liz Archuleta and I represent District Two on the Coconino County Board of Supervisors. I am here today representing the Coconino County Board of Supervisors.

The Coconino County Board of Supervisors appreciates the efforts of Chairman Grijalva and the Committee to hold this important hearing to discuss the community impacts of proposed uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park.

Coconino County is the second largest county in the nation encompassing more than 18,000 square miles. In Coconino County, we are proud to be the home to national treasures, including Oak Creek Canyon, Sunset Crater National Monument, Walnut Canyon National Monument and, most notably, Grand Canyon National Park. Our county includes thirteen percent private land with the remaining land owned by the Federal government, five Native American Tribes and the State of Arizona.

In Coconino County, we pride ourselves on the relationships we have fostered with Native American Tribes, state and federal land managers, as well as our neighboring counties and communities in Arizona and Utah. However, we are certainly concerned when decisions are made by agencies that may affect the health and safety of our residents in Coconino County.

#### FOREST SERVICE DECISION

One such decision was made on January 10, 2008, by the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest. The Tusayan Ranger District issued a decision to allow

VANE Minerals, LLC, to begin drilling exploration holes for uranium at seven project sites on the Tusayan Ranger District. According to the Kaibab National Forest, the primary purpose of the project is for VANE Minerals, LLC, to locate and assess the quantity and commercial resource potential for uranium ore deposits within the Tusayan Ranger District. The location of the drill exploration sites is less than two miles from the Grand Canyon National Park within Coconino County.

According to the Kaibab National Forest, because the 1872 Mining Law authorizes the taking of valuable mineral commodities from Public Domain Lands, a “no action” alternative was not an option for the Kaibab National Forest. Therefore, the decision by the Kaibab National Forest is based on whether mitigation measures are sufficient to reduce or eliminate environmental impacts at the surface, but not on whether or not to allow the exploration activity.

It’s important to point out that more than 2,000 mining claims have been filed with the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest since 2003. The majority of these claims are within ten miles of Grand Canyon National Park.

### **BOARD RESOLUTION**

In reaction to concerns raised by the VANE Minerals, LLC, decision, on February 5, 2008, the Coconino County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution opposing uranium development in the vicinity of the portions of the Grand Canyon National Park and its watershed within Coconino County in the Tusayan Ranger District and additional claims filed on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in House Rock Valley.

Coconino County has witnessed serious health and environmental effects associated with the long-term effects of uranium mining. Uranium development operations in Coconino County have caused considerable contamination and environmental degradation, particularly on the Navajo and Hopi Nations in northern Arizona.

Coconino County has witnessed the contamination of creeks and aquifers providing public drinking water. In the Grand Canyon National Park, the Orphan Mine operated within the park until 1969. The remnants from the Orphan Mine are approximately two miles northwest of the South Rim Village, between Maricopa Point and the Powell Memorial. The presence of radioactive materials from the mine is being blamed for the contamination of Horn Creek in the Grand Canyon National Park.

In addition, in Tuba City, decommissioned uranium mining sites were capped with clay and rock causing groundwater contamination. The decommissioned mine and sites continues to put residents of Tuba City as well as the surrounding areas at risk of contaminated drinking water. For example the Tuba City landfill, which received refuse from the

### **TOURISM/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Grand Canyon National Park is a national and international treasure attracting almost 1.5 million visitors to northern Arizona each year. The Grand Canyon National Park encompasses more than 1.2 million acres and contains extensive geological, paleontological, archeological and biological resources.

With the millions of visitors to Grand Canyon National Park comes significant tourism revenue for communities and counties in northern Arizona. It's estimated that the

total annual economic impact of all Grand Canyon National Park visitors to the north and south rim is approximately \$687 million.

The economy in Coconino County is primarily based on revenue generated by tourism. Therefore, the potential negative impact to tourism in northern Arizona from uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park cannot be overstated. In fiscal year 2009, Coconino County alone generated almost \$12.5 million in sales tax revenue, a large portion of which is generated by tourism and related industries. Couple this with state sales tax collected by the state and distributed to counties and municipalities, sales tax revenue accounts for fifty eight percent of Coconino County's general fund revenues.

While Coconino County continues to support regional economic development opportunities, we are also cognizant of potential impacts from industries. Uranium mining in certain portions of the County has always remained a concern in Coconino County. In the Coconino County Comprehensive Plan, adopted by Coconino County on September 23, 2003, planners discouraged industrial uses, including mining, along scenic corridors or at community gateways, including the Grand Canyon National Park.

### **CONCLUSION**

As outlined in our resolution passed on February 5, 2008, the Coconino County Board of Supervisors supports the permanent withdrawal of lands in Coconino County from uranium development on the Tusayan Ranger District and House Rock Valley. While we certainly support the recent action by the United States Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to temporarily bar the filing of new mining claims in the vicinity of the

Grand Canyon National Park, we support the permanent withdrawal of the lands within Coconino County.

The past mistakes of the uranium mining industry will have ever-lasting effects on areas within Coconino County. While Coconino County, and particularly the Navajo and Hopi Tribes, have faced significant financial costs associated with past uranium development, we cannot place a cost on the long-term health effects left by uranium mining

Thank you for the opportunity to address the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Land in support of H.R. 644, the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act of 2009. The Coconino County Board of Supervisors would like to extend our gratitude to Chairman Grijalva and the Committee for their continued efforts to address this important issue. Coconino County is certainly concerned about the community impacts of proposed uranium development near Grand Canyon National Park.