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80 Groups, Scientists Urge Arizona Governor to Close Uranium Mine in Newly Designated Grand Canyon National Monument

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, *Ariz.*— Echoing pleas from the [Havasupai Tribe](#), [Navajo Nation](#) and other Tribes, scientists and Indigenous, faith, recreation and conservation organizations today [called](#) on Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs to close the Pinyon Plain uranium mine, which is located in the country's [newest national monument](#) near the Grand Canyon. Closing the mine will safeguard Tribal cultural heritage and prevent permanent damage to the Grand Canyon's aquifers and springs.

The groups are calling on Gov. Hobbs to use her authority to rescind permits issued by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and instead issue new permits for closing and cleaning up the mine, also known as Canyon mine.

"This dangerous uranium mine should never have been approved, and we need Gov. Hobbs to fix this terrible mistake," said Taylor McKinnon, Southwest director for the Center for Biological Diversity. "The mining industry and regulators can't ensure that uranium mining won't permanently damage Grand Canyon's aquifers and springs. The governor needs to intervene before more irretrievable damage is done."

The mine, which began extracting uranium ore Jan. 8, is 7 miles south of Grand Canyon National Park and inside the newly designated Baaj Nwaavjo l'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. Although President Biden's national monument designation permanently bans new mining claims and development inside the monument, it exempts preexisting claims with valid existing rights like the Pinyon Plain uranium mine.

"The Pinyon Plain uranium mine threatens the waters that feed Grand Canyon, one of the seven natural wonders of the world," said Sandy Bahr, director for Sierra Club's Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter. "Once the mine contaminates the groundwater, there is no way to clean it up, so the best way to protect Grand Canyon and the people who



depend on its waters is to move forward with closure of this mine, a mine that should have never been permitted.”

The mine sits beneath Red Butte, or *Wii'i Gdwiisa* in Havasupai, a sacred site for the Havasupai and other Tribes who have opposed mining in the area for generations. Red Butte, including the mine site, is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property.

Uranium mining threatens to further deplete and pollute aquifers that communities depend on and that feed the Grand Canyon's biologically critical springs and creeks. Since operators pierced the Coconino aquifer during mine shaft excavation in 2016, the Pinyon Plain mine has pumped between 8 and 11 million gallons of water each year into an open-air holding pond. That water contains concentrations of dissolved uranium and arsenic that have exceeded federal toxicity limits by 300% to 2,800%.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality [claimed](#) it was “virtually impossible” for the mine to pollute the Grand Canyon's aquifers when it approved the mine's aquifer protection permit in 2022. But peer-reviewed studies, including one published after the agency issued the mine permit, have found [that](#) “contaminants, either from land-surface or subsurface sources, are likely to be transported into the deep aquifer, which is the primary source of South Rim springs and drinking water wells,” and [that](#) “a direct connection between the perched C-aquifer and R-M aquifer and mining operations is likely.”

The Pinyon Plain mine also operates under an outdated Forest Service record of decision from 1986 that the agency has refused to update.

As early as 1986, some state officials [warned](#) that mining could pierce and drain shallow aquifers into the mine and contaminate the regional groundwater that feeds seeps and springs in the Grand Canyon. For decades, hydrologists have [echoed](#) warnings that uranium mines could contaminate and deplete aquifers connected to Grand Canyon springs.

“ADEQ issued permits to Pinyon Plain mine relying on analyses that employed faulty scientific representations already refuted when the mine pierced a shallow aquifer,” said Kelly Burke, executive director of Wild Arizona. “Gov. Hobbs has the purpose and the authority to act now before extraction of ore unleashes a forever expanding environmental, economic and health disaster for the people, wildlife and waters of the Grand Canyon.”

Uranium mining has a long history of contaminating land and water and sickening people in the region, including on the nearby [Navajo Nation](#), where hundreds of



abandoned uranium mines still await cleanup. Many regional Tribes, including the Havasupai and Navajo, have banned uranium development on Tribal lands.

"We have a choice in front of us. Allowing the Pinyon Plain mine to proceed is subjecting this landscape and its interconnected waters to a legacy of devastation and disregarding the rights of the Indigenous peoples on the land," said Sanober Mirza, Arizona program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. "Or we can choose a different path — one that holds a promise of protecting the Grand Canyon's cultural sanctity, its people and natural resources."

Ore mined from Pinyon Plain will be transported through Flagstaff and dozens of communities on the Navajo Nation to the White Mesa uranium mill near Blanding, Utah. Groundwater pollution threats from the Blanding mill have prompted [calls](#) for closure from members of the adjacent Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

"[Haul No!](#) volunteers have been monitoring the mine for more than 10 years, even before Haul No! was established," said Leona Morgan, co-founder of Haul No!, an Indigenous-led initiative fighting the mine. "From our photos, [one taken](#) in March 2017, when Energy Fuels was spraying radioactive water into public lands, and the [most recent](#) from Friday, Jan. 26, 2024, of heavy equipment overturned, anyone can see that Energy Fuels continues to have issues at the mine itself. With a failure in oversight from the U.S. Forest Service and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, how can we allow them to transport uranium through our communities, or even mine at all?"