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Contact: Roger Clark, Grand Canyon Trust, (928) 890-7515  
Robin Silver, Center for Biological Diversity, (602) 799-3275  
Sandy Bahr, Sierra Club, (602) 253-8633

### **“Zombie” Grand Canyon Uranium Mine Halted**

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK— For the second time in as many decades, operations to open the Canyon uranium mine six miles south of Grand Canyon National Park have been suspended. The Havasupai Tribe, which had previously challenged the mine, and conservation groups have been working to stop this mine because of potential harm to waters and wildlife of Grand Canyon, as well as cultural resources.

Pursuant to an agreement with the Havasupai Tribe and conservation groups, and citing “business reasons,” Energy Fuels Resources, Inc. decided to place the mine in non-operational, standby status on Tuesday. Uranium prices have dropped to a five-year low during the last three months. The mine was previously placed on standby in 1992, after uranium prices plunged to record lows. The company resumed shaft-sinking operations in early 2013; the current cessation will last at least until a pending a district court ruling or Dec. 31, 2014.

“The Canyon Mine threatens irreversible damage to the Havasupai people and Grand Canyon’s water, wildlife, and tourism economy, so this closure is very good news,” said Roger Clark with the Grand Canyon Trust. “The closure is temporary. Under current policy, federal agencies will permit this mine — like other “zombie mines” across the region — to reopen next year, or 10 or 20 years from now without any new environmental analysis or reclamation. That needs to change.”

The Havasupai Tribe and conservation groups sued the U.S. Forest Service in March over its 2012 decision to allow the controversial mine to open without adequate tribal consultation and without updating a 1986 federal environmental review. The mine is within the Red Butte Traditional Cultural Property, which the Forest Service designated in 2010 for its religious and cultural importance to tribes, especially Havasupai. It threatens cultural values, wildlife, and water, including aquifers feeding Grand Canyon’s springs.

The lawsuit charges the Forest Service with violating the National Historic Preservation Act for not consulting with the Havasupai Tribe to determine whether impacts of the mine on Red Butte could be avoided prior to approving mining. It also alleges violations of the National Environmental Policy Act for failing to analyze new circumstances and science since the mine’s outdated 1986 environmental impact statement. Those include the designation of the Red Butte Traditional Cultural Property, reintroduction of the endangered California condor, and new science showing the potential for uranium mining to contaminate deep aquifers and Grand Canyon seeps and springs.

“It’s been clear for years that the public doesn’t want uranium mining around the Grand Canyon. Now that this mine has been put on hold, the Forest Service has yet another opportunity to do the right thing: protect people, wildlife and this incredible landscape from industrial-scale mining and all the pollution and destruction that come with it,” said Robin Silver of the Center for Biological Diversity.

The mine falls within the million-acre “mineral withdrawal” zone approved by the Obama administration in January 2012 to protect Grand Canyon’s watershed from new uranium mining impacts. The withdrawal prohibits new mining claims and mine development on old claims lacking “valid existing rights” to mine. In April 2012 the Forest Service made a determination that there were valid existing rights for the Canyon mine, and in June it issued a report justifying its decision to allow the mine to open without updating the 27-year-old environmental review.

“It is time to halt this mine — permanently,” said Sandy Bahr, director of the Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter. “It was a bad idea 27 years ago when the now-dated environmental impact statement was issued, it is a bad idea today, and it will certainly be a bad idea tomorrow. Now we know even more about how much Canyon Mine threatens the water, wildlife and cultural resources of Grand Canyon.”

Plaintiffs on the litigation include Havasupai Tribe, Grand Canyon Trust, the Center for Biological Diversity and Sierra Club.

## **Background**

The Canyon Mine is located on the Kaibab National Forest, six miles south of Grand Canyon National Park. The mine’s original approval in 1986 was the subject of protests and lawsuits by the Havasupai Tribe and others objecting to potential uranium mining impacts on regional groundwater, springs, creeks, ecosystems and cultural values associated with Red Butte.

Aboveground infrastructure was built in the early 1990s, but a crash in uranium prices caused the mine’s closure in 1992 before the shaft or ore bodies could be excavated. Pre-mining exploratory drilling drained groundwater beneath the mine site, eliminating an estimated 1.3 million gallons per year from the region’s springs that are fed by groundwater. A 2010 U.S. Geological Survey report noted that past samples of groundwater beneath the mine exhibited dissolved uranium concentrations in excess of EPA drinking water standards. Groundwater threatened by the mine feeds municipal wells and seeps and springs in Grand Canyon, including Havasu Springs and Havasu Creek. Aquifer Protection Permits issued for the mine by Arizona Department of Environmental Quality do not require monitoring of deep aquifers and do not include remediation plans or bonding to correct deep aquifer contamination.

Originally owned by Energy Fuels Nuclear, the mine was purchased by Denison Mines in 1997 and by Energy Fuels Resources Inc., which currently owns the mine, in 2012. Energy Fuels has been operating the mine since April 2013, sinking the shaft and preparing the facility for uranium ore excavation.

*The Grand Canyon Trust is a regional conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Colorado Plateau.*

*The Sierra Club is a conservation organization with 2.1 million members and supporters nationwide and chapters in every state, including the Grand Canyon Chapter in Arizona. Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth.*

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 625,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.*