

OPINION

Congress Must Act to Save the Havasupai Tribe from Extinction | Opinion

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We are the Havsuw' Baaja, the People of the Blue-Green Water; we live in the Grand Canyon.

Since time immemorial, the Havasupai Tribe's home has been in and around the Grand Canyon, along the blue-green waters of Havasu Creek and its waterfalls. We are the guardians of the Grand Canyon and of our ancestral lands above and below its rims. For generations, we have led the fight to permanently protect the Grand Canyon from uranium mining. In our canyon home, water is life.

People around the world marvel at the beauty of the famous blue-green waterfalls of Havasu Creek. But the waters of Havasu Creek are much more than a pretty picture. Our identity, as a small tribe with 750 members, is intrinsically intertwined with the health of Havasu Creek and the environment to which it gives life. Its waters nurture the Havasupai people, our animals and our crops. It is important for gardening and municipal uses as well as cultural and religious ceremonies. It is the sole source of our drinking water.

This water travels deep underground, through layers of rock, before it emerges to reach us, something our elders understood long before scientists confirmed what we already knew. The springs that flow from the rock walls are sacred. Uranium mining on the Canyon's rims, on our aboriginal lands, threatens to contaminate the aquifer that feeds Havasu Creek.

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Energy Fuels operates a uranium mine near Red Butte, our sacred mountain and the origin point of the Havasupai Tribe's creation story. This prevents our tribal members from visiting this sacred place to engage in many of our cultural traditions such as harvesting medicinal plants.



Little Navajo Falls are shown.
ED MOSS

We have seen the irreparable damage uranium mining can do. For generations we have been at the forefront, working to permanently protect our homelands from uranium mining, which has disproportionately harmed and sickened Indigenous people across northern Arizona.

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As residents of the Grand Canyon, our tribe and elders have fought uranium mining for decades, gaining allies along the way who stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us as we work to protect not just our sole source of water, but our cultural identity as Havasupai people.

Numerous tribes have publicly supported a permanent ban on uranium mining around the Grand Canyon, as do many local business owners, hunting and angling groups, local governments and conservation organizations who care deeply about this area. The National Congress of American Indians and the Inter Tribal Association of Arizona have passed resolutions of support as well. The vast majority of Arizonans also support a permanent ban on uranium mining around the Grand Canyon.

We are thankful and supportive of the efforts of Senators Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) for taking a leadership role in this effort and introducing legislation in the Senate to accomplish what congressmen Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) and Tom O'Halleran (D-Ariz.) have been able to shepherd through the House. Now it is up to the Senate to meet its obligations to all the Indigenous peoples of Northern Arizona and join us in protecting this vitally important resource by passing the Grand Canyon Protection Act.

This simple and straightforward law would permanently ban new uranium mines on our ancestral lands. It would



A heron at Havasu Creek.
ED MOSS

prevent new mines from being built on lands currently managed by the federal government, including national forests. It would not affect private or state lands. This law would protect our waters from contamination and ensure the cultural survival of the Havasupai people.



The Havasu Falls are seen.
ED MOSS

Uranium mining threatens our sole source of water, our homelands above and below the rims and our very existence. If the groundwater becomes contaminated and we must abandon our ancestral blue-green waters of Havasu Creek, we would cease to be the Havsuw' Baaja—People of the Blue-Green Water.

The Senate has the power to protect not only our Grand Canyon home and our waters, but also the health and safety of our tribe and the people of the Southwest from the life-threatening effects of uranium mining.

We urge the Senate to do the right thing and protect the Grand Canyon now and for future generations.

Evangeline Kissoon is the chairwoman of Havasupai Tribe. She was raised in Supai Village and has served as a council member of the Havasupai Tribe since 2008.

The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.