



HAVASUPAI TRIBAL COUNCIL

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Havasupai Tribe

Honorable Chairman Thomas Siyuja Sr.

Testimony for the Hearing Record

United States Senate

Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining

Hearing on S. 387, To protect, for current and future generations, the watershed, ecosystem, and cultural heritage of the Grand Canyon region in the State of Arizona, to provide for a study relating to the uranium stockpile in the United States, and for other purposes.

Tuesday, June 7, 2022, at 3:00 pm in Room SD-366 of the

Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC

Dear Chair Cortez Masto and Ranking Member Lee:

The Havasupai Tribe respectfully submits this written testimony in support of the enactment of S. 387, which would permanently withdraw from all future mining claims certain public lands in Northern Arizona. Our current reservation lands, along with our aboriginal homeland, are all under threat of contamination from uranium mining. We wholeheartedly believe enactment of this important and necessary legislation is absolutely essential to protect and secure the future of the Havasupai people, now and for generations to come.

We are the Havasuw '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 to the Havasupai, the precious waters of Havasu Creek are much more than a pretty picture. Our identity as a small tribe of 750 members is intrinsically and culturally 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 our cultural and religious ceremonies. It is the sole source of our drinking water.

This water travels deep underground, through layers of rock, across many miles, before it emerges to reach us. This is something our elders understood and taught us to respect, long before scientists confirmed what we already knew. The springs that flow from the rock walls are sacred and must be protected.

Uranium mining on the Canyon's rims, on our aboriginal lands, threatens to contaminate the aquifer that feeds Havasu Creek.

We know 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.

As residents of the Grand Canyon, our Tribe and our 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 the surrounding environment and our cultural identity as Havasupai People.

There are those who argue that the current administrative ban, due to expire in 2032, is sufficient protection and that we should wait before seeking the permanent ban on new mining claims that S. 387 would authorize. While thankful for the temporary ban, we respectfully disagree. Quite simply, a temporary ban is not enough.

Our way of life is constantly under attack from the mining industry. There is already an existing mine (Pinyon Plain Mine) operated by Energy Fuels near Red Butte--Wii Qdwiisa, our sacred mountain and the origin point of our creation story. The location of this mine, within our traditional cultural property, prevents our tribal members from visiting this sacred place to engage in many of our cultural traditions such as harvesting medicinal plants. S. 387 would prohibit any expansion of this mine.

We know there are those who will argue that due to the war in Ukraine and current supply chain issues, that uranium mining must be restarted to secure our country's energy independence. On this point, we wish to be very clear - the Havasupai Tribe fully supports America's energy independence and the need to secure rare minerals for our future. But, our country's energy independence cannot and should not come at the expense of our lands, where we have lived since time immemorial. Nor should it jeopardize our environment, including the water resources necessary for us to survive.

Numerous tribes, as well as local business owners, hunting and angling groups, local governments, and conservation organizations who care deeply about this place have publicly supported a permanent ban on uranium mining around the Grand Canyon. 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 Arizona Senators Kelly and Sinema for taking a leadership role in this effort and introducing S. 387, which if passed, would align with the companion legislation in the House championed by Arizona Congressmen Grijalva and O'Halleran. Now it is up to the Senate to do what is right and meet its obligations to all the indigenous peoples of Northern Arizona by joining us in protecting this vitally important resource by passing the Grand Canyon Protection Act.

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

This law would protect our waters from potential contamination from new mines and ensure the cultural survival of the Havasupai People. We therefore urge Congress to pass S. 387.