

TESTIMONY  
OF  
SUPERVISOR CARL TAYLOR  
COCONINO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND  
PUBLIC LANDS  
“COMMUNITY IMPACTS OF PROPOSED URANIUM  
MINING NEAR GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK”

MARCH 28, 2008

Chairman Grijalva and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest and Public Lands, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on community impacts of proposed uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park. My name is Carl Taylor and I am a Coconino County Supervisor representing District One. I am here today representing the Coconino County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors appreciates the efforts of Chairman Grijalva and the Committee to bring this issue forward and to hold this important hearing in Coconino County.

Coconino County is the second largest county in the nation encompassing more than 18,000 square miles. Our county includes rugged terrain, canyons, beautiful peaks and forest lands. Coconino County is home to national treasures, including Oak Creek Canyon, Sunset Crater National Monument, Walnut Canyon National Monument and Grand Canyon National Park. Our county includes thirteen percent private land with the remaining land owned by the Federal government, Native American Tribes and the State of Arizona. Coconino County is home to the Navajo Nation Tribe, Hopi Tribe, San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, Havasupai Tribe and the Hualapai Tribes.

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. We strive to make decisions in our communities that protect the health and well-being of our residents. Unfortunately, at times, while actions affect our county and our residents, the decision-making is not in our hands. One such decision was recently made by the U.S. Forest Service to permit the drilling of exploration holes for uranium less than two miles from Grand Canyon National Park.

### Forest Service Decision

On January 10, 2008, the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest issued a decision to allow VANE Minerals, LLC, to begin drilling exploration holes for uranium. VANE Minerals, LLC, is a gold, silver and uranium exploration company that operates in the United States, Great Britain and Mexico. The decision allows VANE Minerals, LLC, to drill 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 east of Highway 64, less than two miles from the Grand Canyon National Park within Coconino County.

Within the decision memo, the 1872 Mining Law is cited as providing the authority for the Tusayan Ranger District to approve mineral exploration and development. The 1872 Mining Law was passed by Congress and signed by President Ulysses S. Grant to protect and encourage mining and settlement in the Western territories.

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.

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.

### History of Uranium Development in Coconino County

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 as identified in the attached map. In the resolution, the Board of Supervisors identified areas in the Tusayan Ranger District and additional claims filed on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in House Rock Valley. The Board of Supervisors cited the potential harm to the Grand Canyon if uranium mining occurred. In addition, the Board referred to previous uranium development operations in Coconino County and the long-term effects on health and the environment.

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 the vicinity of Tuba City. In fact, in Tuba City, decommissioned uranium mining sites were capped with clay and rock causing groundwater contamination. The decommissioned mine and site continues to put residents at risk of contaminated drinking water.

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. Mining waste from the Orphan Mine are present at the upper and lower mine areas and the area is inaccessible to visitors. The presence of radioactive materials from the mine is being blamed for the contamination of Horn Creek in the Grand Canyon National Park.

#### Tourism and Economic Development

Grand Canyon National Park is a national and international treasure. Designated as a National Park in 1919, our state symbol attracts almost five million visitors to northern Arizona to visit the Grand Canyon 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 five million visitors to Grand Canyon National Park comes significant tourism revenue for communities and counties in northern Arizona. The Arizona Hospitality Research and Resource Center at Northern Arizona University estimates 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

2007, Coconino County alone generated almost \$13 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. In addition to the permanent withdrawal, Coconino County supports providing federal land managers with the authority to assess cultural and economic impacts when making decisions under mining and reclamation laws.

The past mistakes of the uranium mining industry will have ever-lasting effects on areas within Coconino County. While workers at the Orphan Mine in the Grand Canyon marveled at the grandeur of the Grand Canyon before plummeting 1,500 feet into the mine to work, our county is faced with the long-term effects of this mine and others on our health and the environment.

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. Our concern about these issues resulted in the passage of the resolution opposing further local uranium development – particularly in light of the Forest Service’s stated inability to deny the requested exploratory activity at the south entrance to Grand Canyon Park.

As identified in the Coconino County Comprehensive Plan, Coconino County places a value on protecting our natural environment, including air and water quality, and balancing our environmental concerns with economic development. The County Comprehensive Plan identified a specific concern with industrial activities in community gateways which would include Grand Canyon National Park.

It is important to recall that the resolution of the Coconino County Board of Supervisors is specific to areas within Coconino County in the Tusayan Ranger District and lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in House Rock Valley. Coconino County continues to work directly with neighboring counties and communities in collaborative partnerships and would welcome the opportunity for these communities to provide comments on any proposals that specifically affect their counties and communities in terms of economic development.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Land. The Coconino County Board of Supervisors would like to extend our gratitude to Chairman Grijalva and the Committee for their continued efforts to address community impacts of proposed uranium development near Grand Canyon National Park.