

Grand Canyon Threatened by Federal Give-Away to Uranium Multinationals

Foreign Corporations Redraw National Park Boundaries

By Kelly Lundeen

If the water was to be contaminated, we believe that the existence of the Havasupai will disappear.
— Carletta Tilousi, Havasupai Tribal Council

We will stand and fight all the way.
— Russell Begaye, Navajo Nation President

The price of uranium is at its lowest in over a decade. Renewable energy production in the US has surpassed nuclear. So why is the Trump administration making it easier to mine uranium? Did the uranium mining companies ask politely? Let's look at what the first year of Trump has brought uranium mining corporations.

Last March Trump issued an executive order requiring federal agencies to propose ways to remove “burdens” from the nuclear and fossil fuel industry. Use of federally protected lands was one area these “burdens” could be removed. Native American communities were not consulted regarding the “burdened” industries and the false, but common assumption was made, that the fate of federal land should be a matter of the United States government rather than its original inhabitants.

In November the Department of Agriculture responded to Trump's order, in part, with a recommen-

dation to lift the ban on new uranium mines near the Grand Canyon. The 20-year ban was put in place in 2012 after five years of campaigning by a coalition of tribal and environmental organizations. In December, the ban was upheld by the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals, a move lauded the world over. However, uranium multinationals have not let the Grand Canyon out of their sight, and the Trump administration may still overturn the ban. On Dec. 20, less than a week after the ban was preserved, another executive order was issued to reduce reliance on foreign imports of “critical” minerals. A draft list of the minerals released in February included uranium.

The same day the Grand Canyon mining ban was upheld, there was a separate ruling against the Havasupai Tribe allowing the Canyon Mine, located on sacred ancestral Havasupai land to open only six miles from the Grand Canyon. The Canyon Mine, owned by a subsidiary of Energy Fuels Resources of Canada, began the licensing process before the ban was in place.

Energy Fuels had another success in December when Trump used the Antiquities Act to slash the size of Bears Ears National Monument (BENM) in Utah by 85%. (The simultaneous reduction in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was related to coal interests.) Although Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke had stated that there was no mine within Bears Ears, the *New York Times* found 300 claims

according to data from the Utah Bureau of Land Management. Just outside of the Monument's newly drawn boundaries, about one-third of those claims are associated with Energy Fuels.

This is not surprising considering they openly lobbied for the reduction in the Monument and distributed maps to legislators carefully detailing areas they would like removed from protected status. In a letter to Secretary Zinke obtained by the *Washington Post*, Energy Fuels Chief Operating Officer Mark Chalmers spelled out the company's areas of concern and added unabashedly, “There are also many other known uranium ...deposits located within the newly created BENM that could provide valuable energy and mineral resources.” Despite the overwhelming support (98%) for maintaining or expanding the National Monuments demonstrated in public comments to the Department of Interior, a foreign mining company had more influence.

Communities on the frontlines and nationwide coalitions are actively opposing the special interests and are not giving up without a fight. To help resist Energy Fuel's Canyon Mine and the transport of uranium is to take Haul No!'s Pledge of Resistance at www.haulno.org/pledge.

— Arizona Public Media, Feb. 6; *New York Times*, Jan. 13; CNN, Jan. 9, 2018; Energy Fuels Resources, Inc., & *Washington Post*, May 25; *USA Today*, Apr. 4, 2017

Dismantling the Nuclear Beast in New Mexico

By Leona Morgan

The Albuquerque-based Nuclear Issues Study Group (NISG), formed in June 2016 “To Protect New Mexico from All Things Nuclear.” NISG came together in response to the lack of young organizers, young activists, and people of color at the forefront of nuclear issues affecting New Mexico. We live in a state that is targeted by the nuclear/industrial complex and we see this as environmental racism. We are primarily concerned about new threats of uranium mining, weapons modernization, and nuclear waste dumping, while many long-standing issues remain unaddressed. We emphasize the need for a new way to reach out to young people, with a focus on recruiting a new generation of New Mexicans to get involved in resisting every level of the deadly nuclear fuel chain.

The co-founders, Eileen Shaughnessy and I, wanted to bring the perspectives of a more diverse and younger population to the

decision-making table of national organizing against nuclear proliferation. Eileen started a class within the Sustainability Studies Program at the University of New Mexico (UNM) called “Nuclear New Mexico”—now in its 7th semester. The class gives students an honest history of nuclear colonialism in our state, as well as a pathway into activism.



A heavy grinder gouges into a deep underground salt bed making room for plutonium contaminated nuclear weapons wastes at the damaged Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), near Carlsbad, New Mexico. (Photo: Nuclear Waste Partnership, Inc.)

I have more than a decade of experience organizing against uranium mining on indigenous lands. Between the two of us, we've been able to tap into a wide network of resources and support to start NISG.

In December 2017, we held our first major event, an educational gathering called “Dismantling the Nuclear Beast: Connecting Local Work to the National Movement.” The symposium featured over 60 organizers, artists, and student presenters, and welcomed more than 200 attendees from across the country. We heard directly from indigenous leaders, organizers, and community members impacted by various stages of the nuclear fuel chain, from uranium mining and milling, to bomb building at Los Alamos and Sandia National labs. Down-winders of the Trinity bomb blast in 1945, and students from Ukraine and Japan—places devastated by nuclear disasters—presented as well. We also had guests from the East Coast and the Deep South who are confronting nuclear reactor and radioactive waste issues. (Videos available on YouTube.com by searching: “Dismantling the Nuclear Beast.”)

Since then, we have been steadily focused on resisting the proposed Centralized “Interim” Storage, aka “CIS” of high-level radioactive waste in the area. NISG proudly participated in the 2018 New Mexico Legislative Session, helping to educate legislators about the threat of CIS and asking them to intervene on the issue. Currently, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is processing an application from Holtec International to build a CIS facility between Carlsbad and Hobbs, a “temporary” dump that would hold all of the nation's waste uranium fuel from commercial nuclear reactors for up to 120 years. In a collaborative effort, NISG worked with UNM students, New Mexico activists and organizers, the SEED Coalition from Texas, and legislators on a letter urging the NRC to slow down the licensing process and allow more time to thoroughly study how this facility and waste transport could impact New Mexico. In total, 21 representatives and nine senators signed on to this letter! Along with local community members, we will present the letter and our concerns at this spring's public hearings to show how, collectively, we believe that nationwide waste transports and dumping on New Mexico are injustices that must be addressed on local, state, and national levels. We will continue to work toward stopping additional radioactive waste from being created in our state, as well as keeping it from being transported and dumped here.

—Leona Morgan works with the Nuclear Issues Study Group in New Mexico. *Information in Resources on Page 6.*

Mining at Contaminated WIPP Resumes

Resumption of mining at the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) on Jan. 15 this year is the latest move toward full-pace operation since reopening in January 2017. Last April the deep underground repository near Carlsbad, New Mexico began accepting shipments of plutonium-contaminated or “transuranic” waste (including tools, clothing, gloves, soil, and debris) from federal nuclear weapons production. WIPP is now receiving six waste shipments a week from decades of accumulated bomb-making material. The waste is placed in one of eight chambers mined 2,000 feet underground in an ancient bed of salt which can be removed at a rate of 10 tons per minute by a heavy gouging machine. The facility is still recovering from a Valentine's Day 2014 accident that contaminated 140 workers, the mine, elevator and ventilation shafts, and surface equipment with plutonium dust when a barrel of waste burst or exploded after being packed at Los Alamos National Laboratory with the wrong type of cat litter.

The repository has yet to return to its previous level of operation. Several safety concerns have not been addressed. “Contaminated air is circulating through the facility, and being vented out. That's not how it

was supposed to be operated,” says Nuclear Waste Program Director Don Hancock of Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC). The Mining Safety and Health Administration, a branch of the Department of Labor, reports 32 unresolved violations since March 2015 with no resulting penalties. Despite the violations, the facility was recertified by the EPA as “compliant” with waste disposal regulations in July 2017.

A return to full operations is expected by 2021 when the new ventilation system, estimated to cost \$400 million, is complete. While that basic milestone has not been met, there are already six separate Department of Energy proposals for expansion and a Strategic Plan that exceeds capacity limits. The most recent proposal includes constructing an above-ground temporary storage pad and increasing the surface waste storage capacity seven fold. The Strategic Plan foresees storing 34,000 cubic meters (20%) more than the legal limit of radioactive waste. —KL

— *Current-Argus*, Jan. 14, 2018; *Associated Press*, Dec. 11; *Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC)*, Sep. 29; *Department of Energy*, Sep. 26, 2017