

# Uranium Mining [re]Starts at Grand Canyon

By Leona Morgan

For more than 80 years, the Navajo Nation has endured excessive exploitation by uranium enterprises — at first, to fuel nuclear weapons and later, nuclear energy — with inadequate cleanup or no cleanup at all. Due to unquantifiable deaths, health consequences, and environmental contamination, the Navajo Nation enacted laws to protect its People and Mother Earth from new uranium mining in 2005 and transport of radioactive materials in 2012.

In November 2023 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (known as “COP” or Conference of the Parties), the United States and 21 other countries committed to triple nuclear power development by 2050 as an empty gesture toward real solutions for climate change. COP 28 was held in the United Arab Emirates, and the President was an oil and gas executive.

In December 2023, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act with two major blows to uranium-impacted communities: the removal of a crucial amendment that would have expanded and extended the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act beyond the two-year band-aid fix that ends in June; and the Nuclear Fuel Security Act.

In January 2024, the price of uranium reached over \$100 per pound. One of the requirements for uranium production is commodification of Mother Earth and a profitable market.

On Aug. 8, 2023, the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni National Monument was created around the Grand Canyon which prohibits uranium mining in nearly one million acres forever. However, due to the 1872 Mining Law, a few mines have what's called “valid existing rights” and are grandfathered in to allow new mining within the national monument.

About half are already “mined out” and should be cleaned up. Of the remaining, two or three mines may be able to move forward with new mining.

Energy Fuels, a Canadian company, owns the Pinyon Plain uranium mine which was permitted in 1986, also known as Canyon Mine. Pinyon Plain is located a few miles from the south rim of the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona on stolen Forest Service (USFS) lands and within this new monument. Energy Fuels also owns other uranium mines and “projects,” as well as the White Mesa Mill in south-east Utah, the only operating conventional uranium mill in the country. Energy Fuels' plan is to extract

the uranium from Pinyon Plain and transport it to the mill with the majority of the route going through the Navajo Nation.

Haul No! is an Indigenous-led volunteer initiative that is working toward protection of communities around the mine, along the route, and near the mill, by working to shut down the mine. Haul No! was established in 2016 and continues to monitor the mine and spread awareness about Pinyon Plain/Canyon Mine and possible transport.

Despite decades of resistance by the Havasupai Nation, local Indigenous Nations, Coconino County Board of Supervisors, environmental groups, and others, Energy Fuels started new uranium mining at Pinyon Plain on Jan. 8, 2024. As of print, Energy Fuels has not yet started transport. The company is not obligated to inform the public or the Navajo Nation, but communicates with USFS, which has a trust responsibility to all federally recognized tribes. And because the ore is less than 1% uranium, the company does not have to label their transport trucks with radioactive placards.

Energy Fuels has not reached what is considered economically viable or “high-grade uranium ore.” With the price of uranium dropping, it is unknown when or if the company will ever have enough high-grade uranium to start transport. The route to White Mesa Mill is over 300 miles long going through several municipalities and Indigenous homelands.

The Navajo Nation has a law against uranium mining and transport of radioactive materials, but the Nation's sovereignty is limited. Because the mine is not on Navajo jurisdiction and the route is mostly on U.S. Highways, the Navajo Nation cannot stop the uranium transport. Less than a mile of the route is on City of Flagstaff streets, but even Flagstaff cannot stop transport.

Because Energy Fuels is not required to share information with the general public, and due to the lack of oversight by the USFS and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), Haul No! visits the mine weekly and is working to inform as many communities as possible in Northern Arizona, reporting to Indigenous communities in person. On multiple occasions, Haul No! has photographed violations by Energy Fuels at the mine and on the route with no repercussions to the company. Haul No! cannot trust the USFS, ADEQ, the colonial governments, or even the Navajo Nation government to regulate or hold the company accountable at the site, along the transport route, and at the mill.

Currently, Haul No! is working to encourage local governments, such as Navajo Nation chapters and Arizona municipalities, to pass resolutions opposing the mine and demanding immediate closure by Arizona governor Katie Hobbs. As of print, there are at least five new resolutions from Navajo Nation entities and the Coconino County Board of Supervisors. These resolutions are new, but opposition to the mine has been strong since the permitting process in the 80s.

As a global treasure and natural wonder of the world, the Grand Canyon has a complex hydrogeological structure and a myriad of places held sacred to at least 13 regional Indigenous Nations. The Grand Canyon national monument is a federal failure. Anyone who has appreciation for the Canyon, for water, and for life altogether can help to put pressure on Governor Hobbs, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and President Biden by informing them and demanding that this 1872 loophole be closed.

Due to circumstances of climate, uranium pricing, and geopolitics, the current political and economical landscapes lend themselves to a possible new wave of uranium extraction and processing, a 21st century uranium boom. Haul No! intends to stop the pin prick that is Pinyon Plain. Haul No! did not support the national monument, but stands strong in its support for the Havasupai Nation's continued fight against the mine and the Ute Mountain Ute Nation's fight against the mill. Haul No! will continue monitoring, spreading awareness, and working toward an end to nuclear colonialism.

For more information visit [haulno.com](http://haulno.com) or follow Haul No!'s social media.

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Hinamoeura Morgant-Cross receives the Nuclear-Free Future Award in New York, November 2023. Photo: Jean-Marie Collin

## Nuclear Ban Treaty

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York City, the United States stuck to its jaundiced opposition and ignored the gathering.

It strikes anti-poverty activists as particularly outrageous that U.S. policy forbids participating in efforts to rid the world of the colossal expense of nuclear weapons. With 38 million U.S. citizens living in poverty, and 16% of all children in the United States — 11.6 million kids total — living in poverty, the cost of the nuclear arsenal appears obscenely vicious and unjust, not just to advocates for the homeless.



Nuclear weapons abolitionists and homeless shelter providers blockaded the doors to the U.S. Mission to the UN Nov. 30, 2023. Photo: Felton Davis, NY Catholic Worker

This is why a group of 18 activists, some of them homeless shelter providers with the Catholic Worker Movement, took the opportunity of the UN nuclear ban treaty meeting to risk arrest. Their action pointed the finger at U.S. rejection of the TPNW, U.S. nuclear weapons production, and its global nuclear threats.

On November 30, a group of about 45 gathered outside the U.S. mission to the UN, directly across the street from the UN. The group brought out banners and stickers and nonviolently embodied the global disgust and anger over U.S.-led opposition to abolishing nuclear weapons.

Around lunch time, the nuclear abolitionists arrived and with a novel “bumper sticker” — 10 feet by 2.5 feet — and successfully stuck it to the U.S. mission's large plate glass front wall. They then divided into small groups that took to blockading the three entrances to the mission. This exercise in nonviolent civil resistance garnered not a peep from the commercial media which favors reporting on terrorist actions, gun violence, and VIP scandal.

The mission doors were blocked for a few hours, the New York police zip-tied and hauled the radical peaceniks off to the precinct. After 4 p.m. the 18 were released with a December court date pending. That hearing resulted mostly in suspended sentences, which is a nearly perfect irony regarding nuclear weapons, which still hang like suspended sentences over everyone.

## Nuclear Justice

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An extract of the resolution: “Today, it is very regrettable for French Polynesia, its population and its environment, that the French State is not a signatory to this Treaty and does not take part in the meetings of the States Parties to the TPNW. This is why, through this motion for a resolution, it is imperative that, as the territory that hosted the French nuclear testing center (Centre d'expérimentation du Pacifique - CEP), and as the population that was and still is a victim of nuclear fallout, we support the TPNW and solemnly ask the Head of State to: as a first step, encourage France to attend the next meetings of the States Parties to the TPNW as an observer state; secondly, work towards France's accession to this new international standard.”

Through this resolution, my wish was to send a powerful message to France, but also to the international community and in particular to the countries taking part in the TPNW meetings: as a French collectivity, Maohi Nui has not the ability to sign onto the TPNW, but wants to be part of the meetings and discussions. Thanks to ICAN, representatives of the community of Maohi Nui were able to take part in the two meetings of the TPNW.