

Nearly 100,000 Comments for Grand Canyon Protection

Thank You to Congressman Grijalva and Congresswoman Kirkpatrick

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 5 -- After nearly 100,000 members of the public called for protecting the Grand Canyon from mining, a Pew Environment Group ad today urged Congress to support legislation that would permanently ban new mining claims on public lands surrounding the park. Under the antiquated mining law of 1872, more than one thousand uranium mining claims have been staked just outside park boundaries.

H.R. 644, authored by Arizona Representative Raul Grijalva, chair of the House National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee, and co-sponsored by Arizona Representative Ann Kirkpatrick, would protect approximately one million acres of U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands surrounding Grand Canyon National Park from new mining claims. The bill would make permanent a moratorium on claim staking called for in July by U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

As the initial public comment period for the Department of Interior's environmental review of the withdrawal proposal ended October 30, 98,355 messages had been received in support. Called for by Grijalva and Representative Nick Rahall (D-WVA), chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, along with Pew and other conservation groups, the withdrawal is a response to federal data that shows thousands of mining claims within five miles of Grand Canyon, Death Valley, Arches and other national parks.

"Presidents since Theodore Roosevelt have recognized that the Grand Canyon, America's national icon, must be preserved for future generations to enjoy," said Jane Danowitz, director of Pew Environment Group's public lands program. "Now it's time for Congress to safeguard the Grand Canyon from threats posed by the 1872 mining law and permanently protect this natural wonder."

Roughly five million people from around the world visit the Grand Canyon each year. The Colorado River, which has shaped the canyon's dramatic twists and turns, is an important source of water for more than 25 million people downstream. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the Southern Nevada Water Authority have both raised concerns about uranium mining near the Grand Canyon.

Hardrock mining is responsible for the largest toxic releases in the United States, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. The 1872 law allows corporations and individuals "free and open access" to more than 350 million acres of public lands across the West, resulting in \$1 billion annually of gold, uranium and other metals mined from public lands without payment of a royalty, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

The Pew Environment Group is the conservation arm of The Pew Charitable Trusts, a non-governmental organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improving public policy, informing the public and stimulating civic life. <http://www.PewMiningReform.org>