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Natural Resources Defense Council ♦ American Rivers ♦ Sierra Club

May 4, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary, Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

The Grand Canyon is one of the great natural wonders of the world and one of the crown jewels of our National Park System. It is, as President Theodore Roosevelt said many years ago, the destination that Americans who can travel should see, a natural treasure that should be “left as it is.”

In July of 2009, in response to the skyrocketing number of new mining claims for uranium and other hardrock minerals near Grand Canyon National Park, the Obama administration issued a two-year moratorium on new claim-staking on roughly one million acres of public lands surrounding it. Now the President and his Department of the Interior must decide whether to extend that ban for the next 20 years under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act or open the door to new uranium and other metal mining that would threaten this American icon and the Colorado River that has run through it for millions of years.

As part of this process, your department recently presented four proposals for new claimstaking on national forest and other federal land around Grand Canyon National Park. However, only one – Alternative B that continues the current “time out” on new claimstaking on the full one million acres – would give this natural treasure and downstream water resources the protection they deserve from new uranium and other metal mining.

Much is at stake. The future of the Grand Canyon and its role in protecting biodiversity, water quality, cultural resources and the economies of gateway communities will be threatened if new uranium or other metal mining around its borders is allowed.

According to the National Park Service, the Grand Canyon region supports a tremendous diversity of life, including more than 2,000 plant and animal species. The Colorado River that flows through the Grand Canyon is an important source of water for more than 25 million people downstream including residents of Las Vegas and Los Angeles. The Grand Canyon also is a huge economic driver for the region. In addition to its iconic status as a national park, the Grand Canyon draws five million visitors each year, which generates nearly \$690 million annually and contributes to the creation of 12,000 full-time jobs, according to a study by the University of Northern Arizona. Finally, the Grand Canyon is a significant cultural and spiritual home for the Havasupai Tribe, among other tribal nations, whose history in the area goes back thousands of years.

The legacy of uranium mining in the United States makes it clear that the threats posed by new activity could be significant. Until 1969, uranium mining was actually conducted inside Grand Canyon National Park. Now, more than 40 years later, the National Park Service is working to clean up radioactive contamination from one of those mines, and warns the public against use of the contaminated Horn Creek, which runs through the park.

With most of our public lands in the West open to mining under the nation's antiquated 19th century mining law, there is no reason why such harmful industrial activity should be allowed around this natural landmark. We call on you to choose Alternative B and protect the full one million acres surrounding the Grand Canyon.

Sincerely,

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