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**THE COALITION OF
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
RETIREES**

Voices of Experience – Advocating Protection of America’s National Parks

Testimony of
Robert L. Arnberger
The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees
Before
The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands,
Natural Resources Committee,
U.S. House of Representatives
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Thank you, Chairman Grijalva, for the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee hearing on H.R. 5583, *The Grand Canyon Watershed’s Act of 2008*. I am Robert Arnberger, Executive Council member of The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, former employees who have joined together in a non-partisan professional organization to bring their views and “voices of experience” to the table in our national endeavor to protect our National Park System. The Coalition’s over 650 members are composed of former professionals who were experienced field leaders, superintendents, technical staff, and Senior Executives representing more than 17,000 years of cumulative experience in managing America’s National Park System.

Before my retirement in 2003, I dedicated 34 years to the protection of our national park system working my way up the ladder from seasonal park ranger, to Chief Ranger, Superintendent of 5 different parks, and finally to Regional Director.

I served as Superintendent at Grand Canyon National Park managing one of our nation’s greatest “crown jewels”, a true “Global Icon” from 1994-2000. My last assignment, after leaving Grand Canyon, from which I retired, was the Alaska Regional Director in charge of over 54 million acres of our nation’s wildest land. I spent virtually my entire career in the field familiar with all aspects of operations that are required to carry out the National Park mission.

I was a second generation park service employee who followed my father in a proud career. I was born at Grand Canyon, on the south rim, in a two room clinic while my father was called away to fight a small forest fire. When I returned to the Grand Canyon as superintendent, it certainly had more meaning for me to also return to the place of my birth...and in some respects the start of my own career!

I congratulate you on the focus of today’s hearing. America’s national park system needs more champions like yourself, and others, because without champions the system of parks, as

we have come to know them, will become an unfortunate footnote of our nation's history, rather than a glowing example for the nation's future.

Because of my familiarity with Grand Canyon National Park, including being the Superintendent of it for 6 years, I have been asked by my colleagues in the Coalition to testify **in support of H.R. 5583**, a "Bill to withdraw the Tusayan Ranger District within Kaibab National Forest and other federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the vicinity of Kanab Creek and in the House Rock Valley from location, entry and patent under the mining laws, and for other purposes."

These withdrawal areas are quite specific for a reason. Much of the area adjacent to the National Park on both the South and North Rims are either off limits to uranium development and mineral entry, as in the case of Tribal lands, or were previously withdrawn when the Grand Canyon Parashant and Vermillion Cliffs National Monuments were created in January of 2000.

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt visited the Grand Canyon - a rugged area not yet a park or national protected area, and wide open to land speculation, unconstrained mining, ranching and logging. Most of us are familiar with Roosevelt's often quoted statement that the canyon was "the most impressive piece of scenery I have ever looked at...It is beautiful and terrible and unearthly". He wanted the canyon to be preserved without a "building of any kind, not a summer cottage, a hotel, or anything else, to mar the wonderful grandeur, the sublimity, the great loveliness and beauty of the Canyon. Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it".

An ardent conservationist, Roosevelt first created the Kaibab Game Reserve in 1906 on the North Rim of the Canyon, and importantly, withdrew mineral entry from that reservation. President Roosevelt did not stop his efforts to protect this great canyon, creating the 1279 square mile Grand Canyon National Monument in 1908, the forerunner of the national park. It would take another 11 years of intense political struggle with private and commercial interests before President Woodrow Wilson, on February 26, 1919, signed into law the act creating Grand Canyon National Park - only several years after the creation of the new agency to manage our national parks called the National Park Service.

President Roosevelt's comments were prophetic as the future of the world's greatest natural resource icon began to develop into the National Park we know today. Never in the history of this park has there been a day that did not carry a threat to its future. The tension between the interests of those who strive to protect the canyon and lands nearby- to "leave it as it is", and the interests of those who wish to develop it, dam it, graze, log and mine it, contributed to and defined, to this day, the park we now know as "THE Grand Canyon".

Grand Canyon is, indeed, a global icon. It has been proclaimed a World Heritage Site, of interest and importance to all peoples of this world. It is an icon of one of the greatest natural treasures America has in its treasure chest. It draws and collects to it a global pilgrimage of visitors who yearn to experience this greatest of all natural wonders. It is also an icon that displays the wounds of massive national conservation battles lost as well as the ribbons of honor for those battles won. Just as the now recently declared "endangered" Polar Bear sitting upon a melting, eroding ice flow caused by global climate change serves as an icon representing global warming, it also serves as an inspiration to challenge the future, to

reverse the course that has created much of the change, and restore what can be saved. So too does the Grand Canyon serve as an "icon of protection" for the State of Arizona, this nation, and the broader international community.

Now we face another proposal that carries the threat to mar and deface the canyon and the landscape that surrounds it. This proposal involves the exploration for uranium in the National Forest lands adjacent to the park. The non-profit research organization, Environmental Working Group, reports that since 2003, 805 new mining claims have been filed within five miles of the boundary of Grand Canyon National Park. A total of 629 of these claims are for uranium and filed in response to uranium market prices that have jumped exponentially in the last several years. Within 10 miles of Grand Canyon an astounding 2251 claims have been staked during the same time period! The Kaibab National Forest reported on January 18, 2008, that they had more than 2100 claims filed in the Tusayan Ranger District alone. Thousands more claims have been filed on BLM lands in the Arizona Strip to the north of Grand Canyon, some of them within the Kanab Creek watershed, a major tributary to Grand Canyon.

Even the most superficial analysis of the explosion in the number of these claims over such a short period would lead a reasonable person to consider there is the potential of a major threat upon the doorstep of one of the world's greatest national park icons. Recent litigation has halted exploration pending the evaluation of the application of NEPA. This can only be construed as a temporary solution. However, it begs the question, "***Why even provide the opportunity for exploration?***" The logical outgrowth of exploration is development. Are we really prepared to allow, to encourage, active uranium mining on successful explorations adjacent to this park – whether it be one hundred holes or just one successful hole? The answer to this fundamental question must be no...and that is why we support this legislation.

We are assured by the proponents that they wish to only explore looking for marketable quantities. We are assured by the uranium industry that extraction today leaves little scars upon the land, that it is safe, protected by new technologies that will prevent the derogation of lands adjacent to, and in, the national park. We are assured this exploration will be far enough from the national park that it will not impact the resource values of the park or ruin the visitor experience of the many millions who visit.

We have heard these kinds of assurances before, have we not? There is a scarred and damaged place on the south rim, within the park, known as the Orphan Mine. There are beams, timbers and metal girders that disgrace the horizon for those visitors in the village or who take the West Rim Drive, signifying the presence of a mining operation that once carried on, on the very edge and into the canyon. It was a working uranium mine clear to 1969, on private land within the park. It now is a Superfund Site, fenced off to visitors, awaiting some sort of remediation for the spoils it left behind. To date, the National Park Service has spent more than a million dollars to investigate the nature and extent of contamination at the Site. Mine wastes are present on the rim, as well as on the steep slope down the canyon to the mine itself. A chain link fence on the rim keeps visitors away from any potential exposure to radiation or other contaminants. A sign on the river's edge down in the canyon where Horn Creek enters the Colorado River warns hikers and boaters of potentially hazardous levels of radioisotopes in the water. I wonder about the assurances that were made by the owners of Orphan Mine back when.

We share concerns with other reputable groups and scientists about the impact upon resources that uranium exploration and development portend.

- Just because exploration or development is not in the park does not mean the resources of the park will not suffer derogation – not just an “unfortunate” possible consequence, but one that is illegal also. The ecological, geological and hydrological connections between the canyon and the lands adjacent to it are formidable and profound. What happens around the park eventually finds its way to the park and vice versa. This park, nor any park, surrounded by public or private lands cannot be treated as an “island” onto itself with the assumption it will be unaffected by activities adjacent to it. At the Canyon we have learned this lesson the hard way when remembering the hard fought battles over dirty air from Los Angeles and even more distant sources ruining visibility across the canyon to the point you could not even see the red rocks of the other canyon wall. We have learned this in the worst way now witnessing the exaggerated melting of the vast polar ice sheets and the rapid disappearance of glaciers due to global climate change, some of which is created by man thousands of miles distant and a hundred years past. Please don’t ask us to believe there will be no impacts upon this landscape that will affect the Park.
- The hydrology of this carved up and buckled plateau is one of the most complicated and interconnected arid lands plumbing systems known to science. The biological health of the Grand Canyon, and to an extent of the Colorado River, depends to a great extent upon the health of the tributaries, springs and seeps that flow into the river in the Grand Canyon. Many, if not most, of the uranium claims on the South Rim are clustered in watersheds and on the aquifers that feed the tributaries, springs, and seeps along the rim and within the canyon. Should contaminated water, soils and spoils migrate into the park the unique biodiversity that depends upon these water sources will be affected. Additionally, flash flood events happen frequently during summer cloudbursts banging down canyons for miles and miles carrying debris before it to deposit on the plateau and into the canyon. These smaller side canyons and tributaries are just that, due exclusively to the action of these kinds of events.
- Let us not forget that “a river runs through it”...and on to other communities down river, to Lake Mead and large agricultural areas carrying with it whatever we put into it.
- Mining exploration and development, even miles from the boundary, means more roads, dust, noise and impacts upon wildlife habitat and natural movements.

Mr. Chairman, the history of protecting the Grand Canyon is a history formed by legislation and litigation. We believe this legislation to be another positive step in the continued protection of this global icon. This Canyon would not be here today as we presently know it, without a long history of protective legislation and litigation. It would have succumbed long ago to dams, reservoirs, mines large and small, power plant coal-smoked skies, Los Angeles smog, and a host of other impacts that have been either headed off or moderated due to citizens who have fought to protect the values this landscape expresses.

Mankind **does** have the power to extinguish this landscape...we have already proven our capacity at that by constructing a great dam up river in 1962, that flooded one magnificent canyon already, that now acts as a concrete plug and for evermore changed the Colorado River ecosystem within the canyon. The modern environmental movement "won its wings" in defeating more dams within Grand Canyon National Park that would have turned the Canyon into another western reservoir. Even as late as 1999 when I visited the Congressman who represented this part of Arizona (he is long gone now) at his office in Washington, D.C., I was treated to his opinion that "it was a sorry day those dams were defeated, and if it were still possible he would work to dam up the Grand Canyon"....submerging what you now see.

We also have the power to save these places. Witness the values of the Grand Canyon Overflights Act of 1987 prescribing protection of natural sounds in the Canyon through more effective management of air tour companies. Witness the values of the Grand Canyon Protection Act of 1992 that sought the restoration of the river ecosystem downstream of Glen Canyon Dam and prescribed the **equal** purposes of the dam to be protection of the downstream environment **and** the development of power. Witness the effectiveness of laws and litigation that has restored better air quality to the canyon by requiring retrofitting of smoke stacks with scrubbing technology costing hundreds of millions of dollars so that we can still see the red rocks on the other side of the canyon.

There are those who will always seek a personal interest that can jeopardize the broader public interest in caring for their parks. Sometimes they are well meaning...and they do have their American rights to business and success as we all do. It takes special people and special conditions to protect places like this Canyon while still providing for commerce, business and the American way of life to continue. It is important for us to not forget that the "American way of life", for the broader public interest, also includes our national conservation ethic. It includes our rights to clean air and water. It includes places for citizens to play in the out of doors, and places for them to also find quiet, nature, and wildness. It includes their national, state parks and city parks where they enjoy their natural and cultural heritage. It includes their places of history and remembrance.

In early November 1995 the President of the United States ordered a closure of all National Parks and other federal installations due to the stalemate with the Congress over funding for the federal government. This was a crisis of national proportions that played out for weeks and left federal employees in the lurch and discouraged the public greatly...especially about **their** national parks. During that crisis I, as superintendent, received a phone call from the Governor of the State of Arizona indicating he planned on "taking over Grand Canyon National Park" using State Highway Patrol officers, State Parks Personnel and the National Guard. Indeed, he arrived at the canyon with all of this contingent...and more...including hundreds of press that played this event out on every national network station across our country. As the Governor and I met and walked on a vista trail at Mather Point, seeking to negotiate some level of opening the national park, in spite of the President's closure order, we stopped and gazed out at the incredibly

sublime scene spread out before us. The Governor then said something to me I will never forget. He waved his hand at that scene below the rim and said, “why do we need any of that down there anyway...all we really need are the hotels on the rim”. I was astounded by the attitude and lack of understanding...as well as the total failure in logic. After all, people filled hotels on the rim in order to look over the edge of the canyon...at the canyon. I could only manage a feeble reply that “**that** down there **is** the canyon...without it there is **no** Grand Canyon”. This official is also gone from the political scene.

I have never forgotten that at least two elected officials from this great state were willing to auction off the Canyon for narrow self interests. The lesson has never been forgotten. It takes special people to save these places for future generations. I congratulate you on this piece of legislation and see it as another essential component to the continued effort to protect this great place from the cumulative assaults we continually, and unfortunately, place before it. A permanent withdrawal of the remaining areas surrounding Grand Canyon National Park from mineral extraction is the only way to accomplish the best, and most lasting, protection for this valuable and irreplaceable National resource and World Heritage Site.