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Hunters and Anglers Support Monumental Action at Grand Canyon

New national monument would permanently protect the region from uranium mining and conserve important fish and wildlife habitat

Today, 11 local Tribal Nations hosted a press conference in conjunction with Congressman Grijalva and Senator Sinema to call upon President Biden to establish our nation's newest national monument, the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument.

Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument would add long-sought and broadly supported protections for 1.1-million-acres of public land adjacent to Grand Canyon National Park and Kaibab National Forest, including a permanent ban on new uranium mining that would protect the watershed along the Colorado River from contamination. National monuments are a flexible type of designation, with proclamations often written to ensure continued state management of fish and wildlife and to provide for a variety of uses, including habitat improvements. The proposed 1.1-million-acre national monument includes both Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands. These agencies would continue to manage this landscape if designated a national monument.

"Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument is broadly supported by Arizonans across party lines and has long been a priority for sportsmen and sportswomen in the state," said Nathan Rees, Arizona Field Coordinator for Trout Unlimited. "Given the toxic history of uranium mining in this region, we commend the leadership of the Grand Canyon Tribal Coalition to enact the wishes of millions of people hoping to preserve the beauty of this idyllic landscape. We cannot undo the toxic history that's been left in this region, but we can prevent new contamination from destroying its future."

After multiple attempts to pass the Grand Canyon Protection Act in Congress, the legislation stalled in the Senate despite strong support from Arizona's congressional delegation. The national monument proposal would swiftly add permanent protections to the Grand Canyon region, preventing further contamination of water supplies and ensuring quality hunting and fishing opportunities for future generations.

"This is some of Arizona's finest wildlife habitat and one of our nation's most iconic landscapes, so permanent protection from uranium mining while prioritizing outdoor recreation and hunting is the right thing to do," said Scott Garlid, Executive Director of the Arizona Wildlife Federation. "Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument honors the perspectives of the tribal coalition, allows multiple uses and access, is consistent with management of the adjacent North Kaibab Game Preserve, and ultimately ensures that the area will be enjoyed by future generations."

More than 500 abandoned uranium mines are scattered across the region, impacting the drinking water of local populations and seeping underground into the Colorado River and other bodies of water found miles away. In fact, a 2010 U.S. Geological Survey study found high-levels of uranium deposits in 15 springs and 5 wells across the region, prompting the 20-year moratorium on mining in the first place.

Unfortunately, the moratorium has simply stopped new mines from coming online and hasn't done anything to clean-up the hundreds still endangering the local population, millions of annual visitors, and some of the state's best areas for trout fishing and big game hunting.

“Going back to Teddy Roosevelt, this area has been recognized for its world-renowned mule deer herd,” said Terry Herndon, President of the Arizona Mule Deer Organization. “We’re happy to see a monument designation that matches the existing withdrawal area, maintains the current management of the adjacent North Kaibab Game Preserve, and prioritizes access for wildlife management and the heritage of hunting in the area.”

This region is also home to an active uranium mining operation, the Pinyon Plain Mine, which is located just miles from the entrance of Grand Canyon National Park. This mine has been allowed to continue operating even after they unexpectedly struck groundwater in 2016, creating the potential for contamination to spread far away from the site through the water table. Local wildlife has also been seen mistakenly identifying the mine’s contaminated retention pond as suitable drinking water and habitat.

Between the hazards posed to local elk and deer populations – in addition to nearby Lees Ferry, which is home to Arizona’s premiere trout fishing – we once again urge President Biden to establish this national monument and commend the Grand Canyon Tribal Coalition for their dedicated leadership on this issue.

“Hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts come from a broad range of backgrounds across the political spectrum,” said Justin Nelson, Chairman of the Arizona Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. “The thing that ties us all together is the conservation of wildlife and wild places. Given the prodigious elk and mule deer hunting across the proposed Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument, codifying the existing mineral withdrawal under this designation is not only good for hunters, it also ensures certainty for the future of this region.”

“Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni Grand Canyon National Monument is a responsible approach given the history of uranium mining near the Grand Canyon,” said Alan Davis, President of Arizona Trout Unlimited. “It is unacceptable given the best science available and the known risks to our natural resources, the economy of Northern Arizona, and the communities that depend on Colorado River water that we continue to gamble with the future of Grand Canyon region. As sportsmen and sportswomen, we value multi-use of our public lands and insist on practical and science-based approaches to managing our natural resources.”

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Trout Unlimited is the nation’s oldest and largest coldwater fisheries conservation organization dedicated to caring for and recovering America’s rivers and streams so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. Across the country, TU brings to bear local, regional, and national grassroots organizing, durable partnerships, science-backed policy muscle, and legal firepower on behalf of trout and salmon fisheries, healthy waters and vibrant communities.

The Arizona Wildlife Federation is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating, inspiring, and assisting individuals and organizations to value, conserve, enhance, manage, and protect wildlife and wildlife habitat for the last 100 years.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers seeks to ensure North America’s hunting and fishing heritage by enhancing public access, conserving habitat, and advancing policies that benefit our wild lands, waters, and wildlife. With chapters in 48 states, Washington, D.C., two Canadian provinces and one Canadian territory, BHA is attracting support from hunters and anglers across the continent who share our commitment to fair chase and the ethical pursuit of wild fish and game.