



Online news source for Kingman, Arizona & Mohave County

Groups file lawsuit to stop mining near Grand Canyon

Suzanne Adams

Miner Staff Reporter

Friday, November 20, 2009

KINGMAN - New mining jobs in the Arizona Strip area may be put on hold. The Center for Biological Diversity, the Grand Canyon Trust and the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit Nov. 16 challenging a Bureau of Land Management permit for the Arizona 1 Mine.

"I'm very disappointed," said Mohave County Supervisor Gary Watson when he heard of the lawsuit. "It's absolutely absurd to me to lock up one of the richest deposits of uranium in the continental United States."

"As far as we're concerned we have all the necessary permits," said Denison Mines Corp. President and CEO Ron Hochstein, which owns the uranium mine. The company is not named in the lawsuit.

The mine is located 45 miles south of Fredonia and north of the Grand Canyon National Park. It is one of three mines owned by Denison within the boundary of a 1 million-acre area south and north of the Grand Canyon that the federal government is considering withdrawing from all mining for the next 20 years.

The company is still working on air quality permits for the other mining claims it has in the area. At this time, the federal government is not allowing any new mining claims in the area.

In their lawsuit, the conservation groups are claiming that the BLM failed to update a 1988 environmental assessment before issuing a permit to Denison in September.

"The mine has been down for more than a decade," said Roger Clark of the Grand Canyon Trust. It would be prudent to re-evaluate the area, he said. New information has been collected about the area's groundwater and endangered species, and changes to BLM management policies have happened since the mine was closed in 1992, he said.

The conservation groups are also claiming that the BLM did not examine the validity of mine's claim and did not request a new plan of operation for the mine.

The conservation groups state in a news release that the mine's old operation plan expired when it was closed, and the company never established that there was a viable uranium deposit in the area, which is required in order to file a mining claim.

All claims pertaining to the mine have been kept in good standing since the mine was staked in the 1980s, Hochstein said.

The conservation groups have not requested a halt to any mining activity in the area, but they may in the future, Clark said.

Watson said he agrees that mining should not be allowed in the Grand Canyon National Park, but the Arizona 1 Mine is outside of park limits and Denison has met all of the permit qualifications.

According to company's Web site, the mine would employ 32 people and cost \$2.3 million to get started. It would mine begin mining in the first quarter of 2010. The company plans to get about 857,000 pounds of uranium ore over the next three years and is expecting to sell it for between \$53 and \$65 per pound.