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Conservation groups challenge uranium mining threat to Colorado River

By [Mary Manning](#)

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Conservation groups are challenging Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne today, saying he is allowing uranium exploration near the Colorado River and Grand Canyon National Park contrary to a congressional resolution passed in June.

Congress on June 25 prohibited uranium mining activity across 1 million acres of public lands in watersheds leading to the Colorado River that surround the Grand Canyon.

But the lawsuit says Kempthorne has continued to authorize new uranium exploration within the withdrawal area north of Grand Canyon, violating federal environmental laws that require study before any such actions take place on public lands. [The lawsuit was filed this morning in U.S. District Court in Prescott, Ariz., by the Center for Biological Diversity, Grand Canyon Trust and Sierra Club's Grand Canyon chapter.](#)

Recent spikes in the price of uranium have caused thousands of new uranium claims, exploratory drilling projects and moves to open uranium mines on public lands north and south of the Grand Canyon.

Concerns about surface and groundwater contamination have been expressed by Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and tribes including the Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai and Kaibab Paiute nations and Coconino County, Ariz.

Southern Nevada Water Authority officials said they believe any environmental analysis needs to include the implications from radiation levels in the Colorado River, which serves more than 23 million residents of California, Nevada and Arizona, water authority spokesman J.C. Davis said.

"That means that the source of drinking water quality is protected," Davis said.

Previously, the federal government has moved to withdraw sensitive public lands from such threats, the lawsuit said.

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