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Opponents seek to halt Arizona uranium mining operation

The battle to stop the Arizona 1 uranium mine has escalated as opponents have asked a federal court to immediately stop mining at the operation.

By Dorothy Kosich

RENO, NV - Environmentalists and a northern Arizona Paiute tribe have filed a preliminary injunction asking mining be stopped at Denison Mines' Arizona 1 uranium mine.

The Arizona 1 uranium deposit is located in north central Arizona 35 miles southwest of Fredonia. Its ore is hauled 315 miles to Denison's White Mesa mill near Blanding, Utah.

It is the first active mine in the Arizona Strip in 20 years. The Arizona Strip is north of the Colorado River.

The underground mine is expected to produce a total of

856,763 pounds of U₃O₈ of which 156,000 pounds is planned to be available for sale in 2010, 461,000 pounds in 2011 and 240,000 pounds in 2012.

Three environmental groups--the Center for Biological Diversity, Grand Canyon Trust, and the Sierra Club along with the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians--sued the Bureau of Land Management late last year, claiming the BLM violated environmental laws by not requiring a new plan of operations. The mine's existing plan of operations was approved by the BLM in 1988.

The plaintiffs also assert the mine impacts the Grand Canyon, restricts access to cultural and

religious sites, and introduces radioactive materials into the environment. They are seeking a court injunction to force Denison to stop mining operations and exploration at Arizona 1 until the BLM complies with all applicable laws.

Toronto-based Denison has asked to be an intervener in the lawsuit. Denison plans to mine 1.8 million pounds of U₃O₈ this year from its U.S. and Canadian operations.

The Arizona 1 deposit is one of a number of breccias type deposits in Arizona owned by Denison, which are planned to be developed in sequence to produce a total of 4.7 million pounds of U₃O₈.