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Suit filed to block uranium mine

By DAILY SUN STAFF

The Havasupai Tribe and three conservation groups filed suit Thursday in an attempt to block the opening of a second uranium mine in the Grand Canyon region, this one about six miles south of the South Rim.

The Canyon Mine lies south of the town of Tusayan and has long been a source of division between would-be miners and area tribes and conservationists.

It has never been mined, but it is being prepared for a possible reopening next year.

The Grand Canyon Trust, Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, and tribe assert the Kaibab National Forest failed to update a 1986 environmental analysis as required by federal law or consult with tribe under the National Historic Preservation Act.

The groups are asking a federal judge in Prescott to block the opening of the Canyon Mine. The Havasupai waged a similar legal battle in 1988 before the price of uranium crashed and the mine was mothballed.

Although this mine is part of roughly 1 million acres of federal lands bordering the Grand Canyon that Interior Secretary Ken Salazar put off-limits to new mining in early 2012, the Kaibab National Forest has decided it fits the definition of a pre-existing mining claim -- or one not covered under the mining moratorium.

Opponents are challenging the idea that this mine should be allowed to operate in an area otherwise off-limits to new uranium mining.

Denison Mines formerly owned the mine, but sold it to Canadian company Energy Fuels Resources in June 2012, according to the lawsuit.

If opened, this would be the only uranium mine south of Grand Canyon, with ore to be hauled to Blanding, Utah, for refining.