

# The New York Times

JANUARY 6, 2012

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## U.S. to Block New Uranium Mines Near Grand Canyon

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By FELICITY BARRINGER

The Obama administration is set to announce on Monday that it will block new uranium mining on one million acres in northern Arizona near the Grand Canyon, lobbyists and Interior Department employees who had been informed about the decision said on Friday.

The department, which in 2009 imposed an interim ban that is soon due to expire, now plans a 20-year moratorium on new mines. Western environmental groups have long sought such a measure.

In proposing an extended moratorium last year, the interior secretary, Ken Salazar, cited the potential for pollution in waterways and harm to wildlife, desert vegetation and air quality.

There is perennial dispute over whether uranium contamination detected in the area is natural or caused by humans.

The Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group, says that at least one creek in Grand Canyon National Park, immediately below an old site known as the Orphan Mine, is contaminated with levels of uranium more than 10 times the federal limit.

Lee Allison, Arizona's state geologist, citing his office's work, questioned whether any Colorado River pollution from mining would be detectable, given that about 60 tons of natural uranium flow down the river each year.

Uranium mining in northern Arizona and southern Utah has moved ahead in fits and starts over the past 80 years, generally in tandem with demand.

The pressure for new mines has abated in anticipation of the ban, state officials said. Existing mines, numbering perhaps a dozen within the three blocs of land that make up the million acres in question, will

probably be able to continue operations or to restart them when uranium prices make mining worth the effort again.

The long moratorium has been opposed by the region's Congressional Republicans. They argue that it would prevent the creation of thousands of jobs and upend a 28-year-old compromise on land use forged by environmentalists and mining proponents during the Reagan administration.

Taylor McKinnon, the public lands campaigns director at the Center for Biological Diversity, welcomed the decision. "Grand Canyon National Park is an international icon, a biodiversity hot spot and the economic engine for much of the Southwest's tourist industry," he said.