

Guest opinion: Bill would save Grand Canyon from uranium mining

Tucson Citizen

By Raul M. Grijalva

Arizona is called the Grand Canyon State for a reason. One of the world's greatest natural wonders - the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River - happens to be here.

Grand Canyon National Park draws millions of visitors from across the world who marvel at its beautiful and twisted topography, hike its trails, run its river rapids and find solitude in a place that seems remote and removed from the hectic and confused world in which we live.

Once again, however, we face a threat to this grand place that must be fought and eliminated.

The U.S. Forest Service proposes to allow exploration for uranium on the lands and drainages adjacent to the park.

It proposes to accept the tearing and ripping at those lands because uranium's market value has risen to the point where some stand ready to sacrifice the enduring values of this great canyon for the lure of dollars to line corporate pockets.

The Forest Service says mining companies intend only to "explore" and that this is a minimally invasive process and should not affect the values of the canyon.

I say even exploration is too much.

I ask: What if they find something of value? Are we prepared to sacrifice this global icon for a uranium mine?

The answer must be an immediate no.

We must eliminate this threat and deny the opportunity to explore or to dig or rip up the land looking for minerals anywhere adjacent to the canyon.

I have introduced HR 5583, The Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act of 2008, to do just that. I join with other state, local and tribal leaders, who once again stand ready to join the fight to protect our Grand Canyon and do what is necessary to prevent those with narrow economic interests from destroying it.

Sadly, I believe that if we don't find a better way to protect our parks, they will die of a thousand small cumulative cuts.

There are those who pursue seemingly insignificant actions on park boundaries, prying pieces from their greatness here and there - all the while denying any intention to ruin a park.

We must find ways to defeat this cumulative neglect of our National Park System and to assure they are passed unimpaired to the next generation.

I offer yet another individual piece of legislation standing for the protection of one of them - the

magnificent Grand Canyon.

There is no place in the world like it. It deserves better than the assaults it seems to consistently face - as does our nation's entire system of national parks.

Raúl M. Grijalva is a Democrat who represents southern Arizona's 7th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.