

**TESTIMONY TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS
OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
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Mr. Chairman I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the members of this subcommittee. I am here to speak in support of H.R. 855, the Grand Canyon Watersheds Protection Act, sponsored by Congressman Grijalva, and in opposition to H.R. 3155.

My name is Stephen Verkamp and I spent my entire childhood living within 50 yards of the edge of the south rim of the Grand Canyon.

My grandfather John G. Verkamp built a souvenir and handicraft store in 1906, 13 years prior to the area becoming a national park. Until closing the store in 2008 we were the longest, continuous family-owned business in the entire national park system in the United States.

When we speak of "The Grand Canyon" it must be understood that the Canyon does not start at the edge of the precipice. Nor is it an arbitrary line on a map, but rather it is the sum-total of the entire area surrounding those edges. Wildlife is not concerned with mans arbitrary map making.

The public lands surrounding the national park are likewise critical to the integrity of the “wild” nature of the environment and must be protected!

As a kid living on the rim of the Canyon, I recall playing on a dirt football field where the under-lay was constructed from Orphan uranium mine tailings.

I can recall chunks of uranium ore falling off the truck on the road below our residence. Naturally, being kids we would pick up these pieces of ore with our hands and examine them. These mining practices were life threatening and a total outrage.

Later in my adult life, I was privileged to be the first full time federal judge with jurisdiction over Grand Canyon National Park and the National Forests that surround the Canyon and are the subject matter of H. R. 855 These experiences, I believe, strongly deepens my understanding of this area.

I mention these personal experiences to express my grave concern about what could be the outcome if Congressman Franks’ bill is passed and new uranium claims are developed around the Grand Canyon.

A major impact on the areas in question will be the dust pollution that will inevitably create an enormous problem.

The actual and potential mines on the South Rim are bounded on the east by Highway 89 and on the west by Highway 64. These two highways are all single-lane and heavily burdened with tourist vehicle traffic to the Grand Canyon. The area we are talking about is all within what can best be described as a “dust bowl” due to the extremely dry conditions of northern Arizona. The ore trucks would have to use dirt roads to reach these highways.

There is simply no way that a relentless parade of ore trucks could do anything except create serious safety and air quality issues.

It’s my personal experience any vehicle creates an enormous cloud of dust that can be seen for miles. I can only imagine what huge ore trucks will create. There are no other ways to transport ore to its destination other than by use of the highways I mentioned. The prevailing southwest to northeast

winds will carry the truck dust directly into the national park and surrounding area.

The impacts I have described do not begin to touch on the economic costs of allowing new uranium mining.

It is estimated that the regional economy centered on Grand Canyon exceeds \$700,000,000.00 each year. According to the 2010 national park statistics more than 1,440,234 vehicles entered one or the other of the roads in the park we have discussed. At a conservative 2 persons per vehicle nearly three million tourists visited the park by vehicle alone.

The costs to taxpayers of restoring mined out areas amount to millions of dollars paid by taxpayers like the case of the Orphan Mine.

In my personal experience the effect of major and minor changes in the park and surrounding forests affect tourist visitation and small businesses in very real ways.

For example, several years ago there were not enough entrance stations into the park. This fact spread on the Internet like wildfire. Sales in our store were greatly reduced by this seemingly small issue. The New York Times and other media ran these stories because everyone in the country has a special love for this incredible place. The tourists went other places such as Las Vegas rather than wait the long entrance lines.

Another example involved the closing of the National Park in the mid 90's when congress shut down the government. The economic impact on our family business was so great that my father wrote a check to the Grand Canyon Park Service to try to help keep the park open. Once again, an outside event created an economically devastating impact on businesses within the park.

In closing, I would like to submit a letter signed by me and the many Arizona business owners who support Secretary Salazar's ban.

I want to thank the Chairman and members of the sub-committee for allowing me to testify at today's hearing.

