

US moves to end ban on new uranium mining near Grand Canyon

November 2 2017, by Paul Davenport

U.S. officials said Wednesday they have proposed ending the Obama administration's ban on new uranium mining leases on public land outside Grand Canyon National Park.

The Forest Service proposed the change in response to President Donald Trump's executive order for federal agencies to eliminate restrictions on energy production.

The Trump administration has moved to unravel former President Barack Obama's environmental regulations aimed at curbing climate change.

"Adoption of this recommendation could reopen lands to mineral entry pursuant to the United States mining laws facilitating exploration for, and possibly development of, uranium resources," according to a report last week by the Forest Service's parent agency, the Department of Agriculture.

The Oct. 25 report also said it's in the national interest "to promote the clean and safe development of America's vast energy resources." Nuclear power plants use uranium as fuel.

Conservationists are decrying the Forest Service's move, saying past uranium mining in the region has polluted soils, washes, aquifers and drinking water.

"The Forest Service should be advocating for a permanent mining ban, not for advancing private mining interests that threaten one of the natural wonders of the world," said Amber Reimondo, energy program director of the Grand Canyon Trust based in Flagstaff, Arizona.

Grand Canyon Trust officials said there will be a public comment period on the issue, but it's unclear when that process will begin. The decision will be finalized and implemented after that with little or no room for appeal, the officials said.

In 2012, then-Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar banned new hard rock mining for 20 years on more than 1 million acres of national [forest](#) and Bureau of Land Management land near the Grand Canyon. He said he was acting to protect a "priceless American landscape."

The ban did not affect existing [mining](#) claims in the region.

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