



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren calls upon federal government to protect tribes from new uranium mining near Grand Canyon

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren today issued a statement that calls upon the federal government to protect tribes from the harmful effects of new uranium mining.

“I join our neighboring tribes and the many non-Native organizations to implore the federal government to uphold its promise to protect us,” the President wrote.

“Today, we face a new threat from a uranium mine just recently put into operation that is located only 10 miles south of the Grand Canyon’s South Rim and within the boundaries of a newly declared national monument,” President Nygren stated. “We are very concerned about the impending transport of radioactive materials from the Pinyon Plain/Canyon uranium mine to White Mesa Mill in Utah.”

The routes to transport uranium will now pass through several Navajo Nation communities from Grey Mountain and Cameron, Ariz., to Bluff, Utah, in conflict with Navajo Nation law, he said.

In 2012, the Navajo Nation Council passed the Radioactive and Related Substances Equipment, Vehicles, Persons and Materials Transportation Act. The law addressed hauling uranium within the

Navajo Nation. It states that the Navajo Nation opposes the transportation of radioactive products over, on, under and across Navajo Nation lands.

“The pain is still vivid in our collective memory, and yet history is repeating itself. We can prevent it. We call upon our federal trustee and our state partners to ensure that it is prevented.”

– Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren

President Nygren stated that the recently opened Pinyon Plain/Canyon Mine was and remains opposed “by all neighboring tribes that have forever called Grand Canyon their home.”

“Despite all of our objections through the years, we learn through the media, rather than from our federal trustee – the U.S. Department of Agriculture/ U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior/Bureau of Land Management – as would correctly expect, that our land and water will again be threatened with contamination,” he said.

“Our relatives, the Havasupai, Hualapai, and other tribes along the Colorado River, are bracing themselves for renewed anxiety, worry and

constant unease about the safety of their resources and homelands.”

He noted that in April 2005, the *Diné* Natural Resources Protection Act established a moratorium on uranium mining and milling on the Navajo Nation. The law states that no further harm to the Navajo culture, society, way of life or economy would be permitted through uranium mining or processing within Navajo Nation borders.

“This moratorium will remain until all adverse effects of past uranium mining – economic, environmental or health-related – have been either eliminated or substantially diminished,” President Nygren said. “We have not reached that point.”

He said the Navajo Nation has residents who still suffer from a growing list of illnesses linked to exposure from past uranium mining labor, contaminated building materials and secondary exposure from miners’ clothing from the mid-1940s to the late 1970s.

“To this day, hundreds of abandoned uranium mines dot our landscape, unremediated, still

exposed to the elements,” he said. “Our elders’ calls for relief go unanswered as they mourn the relentless toll exacted upon our communities.”

He reiterated his disappointment last month when Congress removed Radiation Exposure Compensation Act amendments from the National Defense Authorization Act of 2023. The amendments would have expanded provisions that would have benefited hundreds of Navajos and their families.

“This rejection sent a clear and dismaying message,” he said. “The true sacrifices of the Navajo people and other uranium workers remain unacknowledged by the federal institutions and corporations profiting from the exploitation of uranium.”

“The pain is still vivid in our collective memory, and yet history is repeating itself,” President Nygren said. “We can prevent it. We call upon our federal trustee and our state partners to ensure that it is prevented.”

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