

Pinyon Plain Uranium Mine (formerly Canyon Mine)

A brief history

Updated:
September 26, 2024

1872

The General Mining Act is signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant, establishing the basic framework still applicable today for prospecting and mining of hardrock minerals including gold, silver, and uranium on federal public lands royalty-free.



Miner panning for gold in Alaska in 1872.

1984

A plan of operations is submitted to the Forest Service to mine Canyon 73-75, three uranium claims on the Kaibab National Forest south of the Grand Canyon, near the Havasupai Tribe's sacred mountain, Red Butte.

1986

Canyon Mine approved by the U.S. Forest Service.



1990

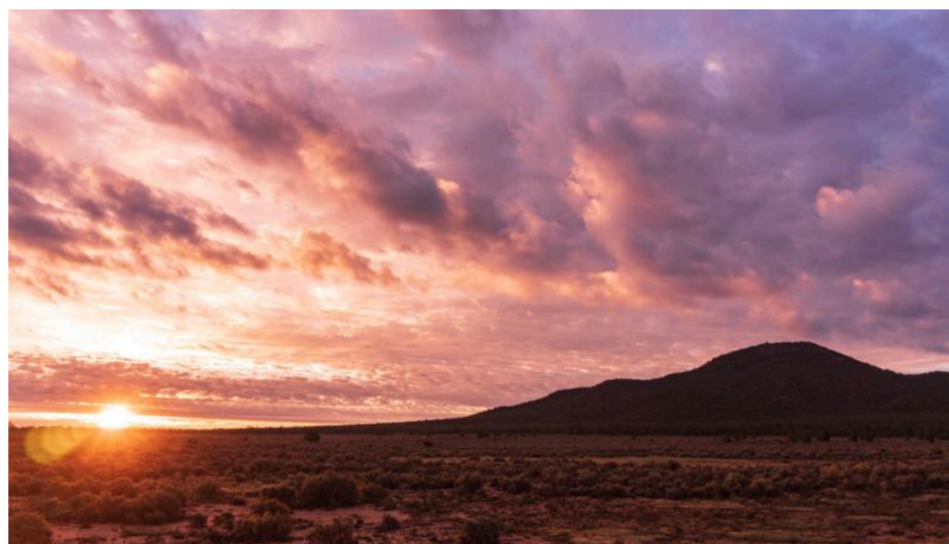
The Havasupai Tribe's lawsuit over the mine is dismissed, a decision later affirmed on appeal.

2006-2008

Uranium prices spike. Companies rush to the Grand Canyon region. By the end of the decade, thousands of mining claims will surround Grand Canyon National Park.

2010

Red Butte designated a traditional cultural property under the National Historic Preservation Act.



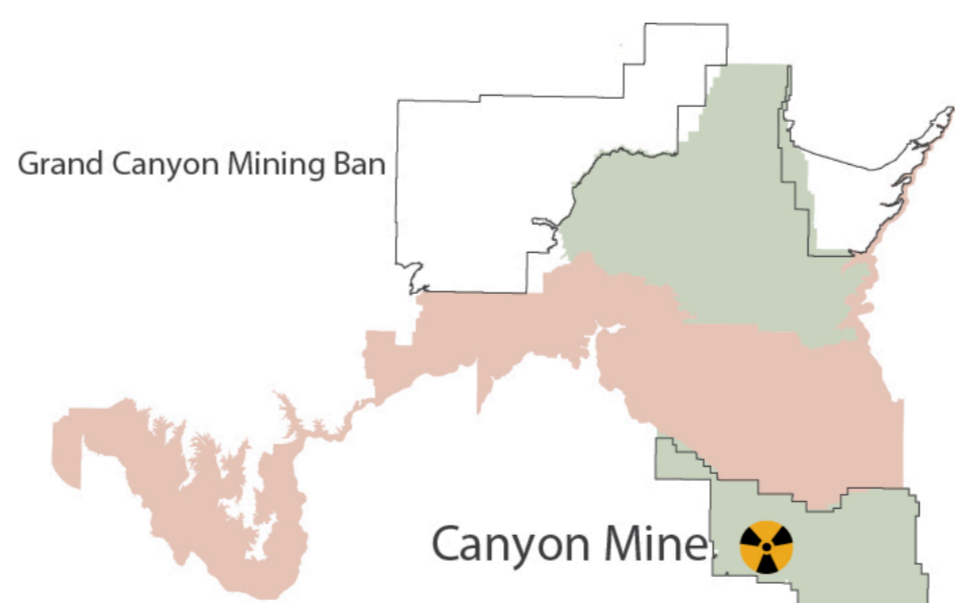
Red Butte at sunrise.

2009

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar establishes a temporary administrative mining ban on about 1 million acres of public lands near the Grand Canyon.

2012 - January

A temporary 20-year Grand Canyon mining ban begins.



2012 - April

The Forest Service determines the mine has valid existing rights under the antiquated 1872 mining law, exempting it from the temporary mining ban.

2012 - June

The Kaibab National Forests reviews the mine's 1986 plan of operations and determines no updates are needed to the then 28-year-old plan.

2013

The Havasupai Tribe and conservation organizations including the Grand Canyon Trust file a lawsuit over Canyon Mine.

2016

Miners pierce an aquifer at Canyon Mine and water begins flooding into the mine shaft.



Water cannons spray water pumped from the flooding mine shaft into the air to speed up evaporation.

2020

Canyon Mine is renamed Pinyon Plain Mine in an apparent attempt to escape controversy.

2022 - February

Legal efforts to prevent the mine's exemption from the mining ban prove unsuccessful due to the antiquated 1872 mining law.

2022 - April

The state of Arizona issues the mine a new individual aquifer protection permit.

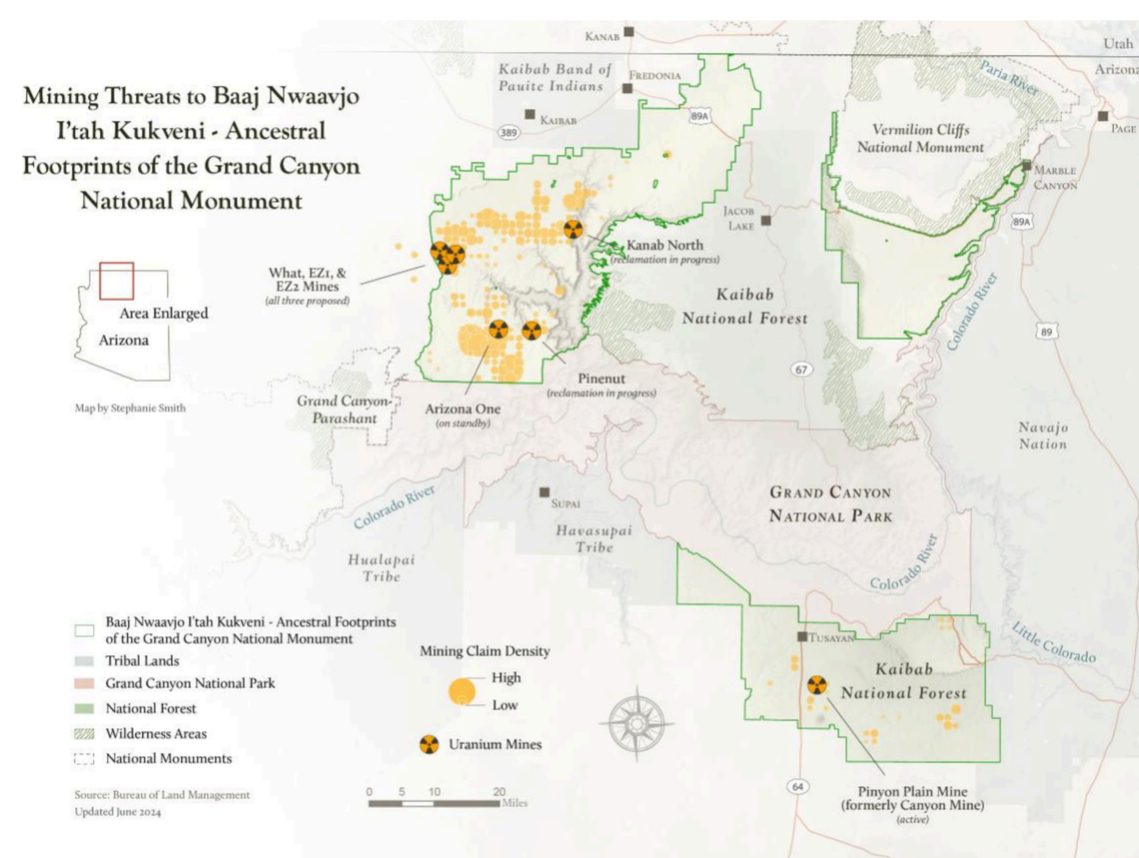


Havasupai tribal members protest on the steps of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.



2023 - August

President Joe Biden establishes Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni - Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. The monument includes a permanent mining ban, but Canyon Mine is exempt from it, because of the 1872 mining law.



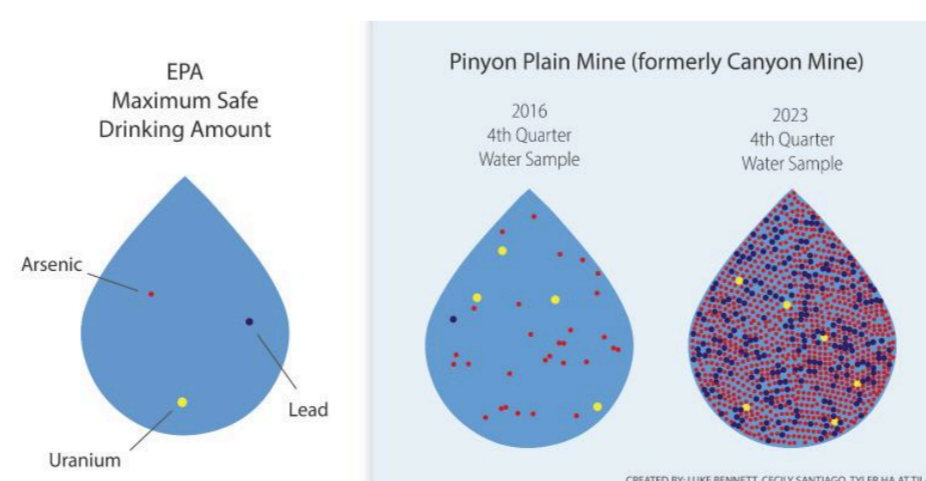
2023 - December

The mine begins extracting uranium ore.



Pinyon Plain Mine (formerly Canyon Mine).

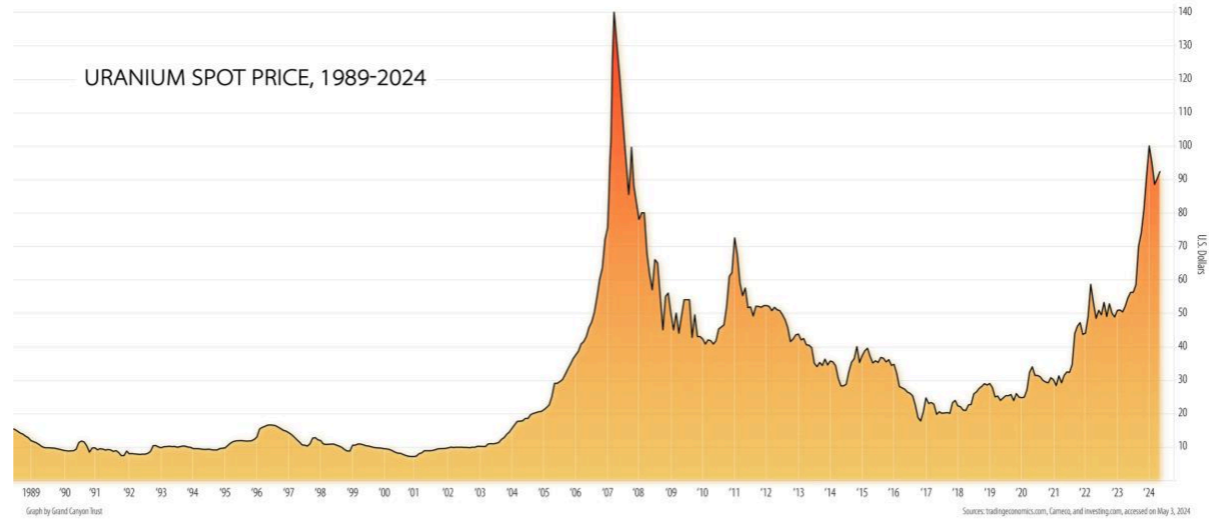
The total volume of water pumped out of the mine since it hit groundwater in 2016 tops 66 million gallons. Analysis shows high levels of uranium, arsenic, and lead in the water pumped out of the mine shaft.



Mine shaft impoundment water analysis comparison to EPA maximum safe drinking amount.

2024 - January

Uranium spot prices surge, topping **\$100 per pound** in January.



Uranium spot price from 1989-January 2024.

2024 - June

A new study of groundwater in the Grand Canyon region points to evidence that uranium mining threatens water sources in Grand Canyon National Park.

2024 - July

Trucks begin hauling uranium ore from the mine to the White Mesa uranium mill in southern Utah.



Protests begin.

Native American tribes, including the Havasupai Tribe and the Navajo Nation, strongly object to hauling.

Navajo Nation plans to test limit of tribal law pr...

The Navajo Nation plans to test the limits of a tribal law that banned the transportation of uranium ore on its lands.



<https://apnews.com/article/uranium-navajo-transport-arizona-mine-energy-nygren-d697115b7aed897e3667f10ef4ee1f14>

2024 - August

Uranium hauling from the mine to the White Mesa Mill is temporarily paused for discussions between the mine's owner and the Navajo Nation.

The Arizona attorney general [calls](#) for an updated environmental review of the mine to take into account new scientific findings about groundwater in the Grand Canyon region.

Protests continue.



Protestors at the Pinyon Plain Mine turnoff in August 2024, near the south rim of the Grand Canyon.

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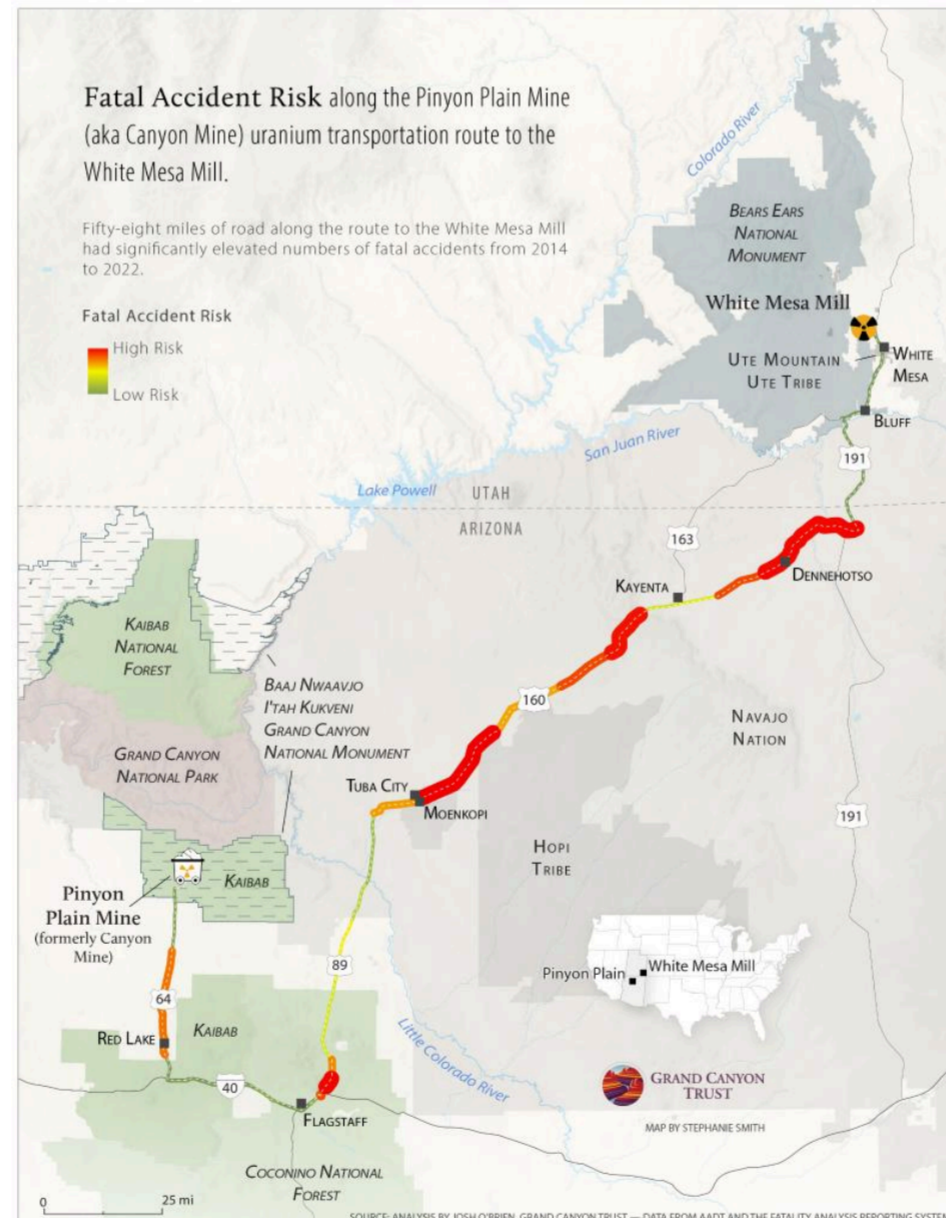
"Our Navajo people have suffered for many years, and many lost their lives due to uranium mining on our homelands. The Navajo Nation will continue to oppose and fight against the transportation of uranium ore through our lands for the health and safety of our people."

Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalnye Curley

September 2024

Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs sends a letter to the U.S. Forest Service urging an updated environmental review of the mine.

Data analysis reveals an elevated risk of fatal accidents along stretches of the mine's uranium ore haul route, especially on the Navajo Nation.



Fatal accident risk along the Pinyon Plain Mine (aka Canyon Mine) uranium transportation route to the White Mesa Mill.