

Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal EIS

Newsletter #1 - March 2010

Public Scoping Report Now Available

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed a Scoping Report for the Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on February 25, 2010. The report provides a summary of the scoping efforts completed by the BLM and the scoping comments received by BLM. The purpose of scoping is to provide an opportunity for members of the public to learn about the proposed project and to share any concerns or comments they may have. Information gathered by the BLM through the scoping process will be used in developing the EIS. Comments will be used to help identify a range of alternatives, as well as to identify issues and concerns to be considered in the EIS.

The BLM hosted two public scoping meetings (September 30, 2009, in Fredonia, Arizona, and October 15, 2009, in Flagstaff, Arizona). The open house meetings were designed to allow attendees to view informational displays, make inquiries of project specialists, and submit written comments. Handouts and displays were provided to inform attendees about the proposed withdrawal and the EIS process. Comments received between August 26, 2009, and December 7, 2009, were included in the Scoping Report. Although the Scoping Report is complete, the BLM will continue to accept scoping comments identifying relevant issues throughout the EIS process.

The breakdown of comment submittals is presented in the following table.

Submittal Type	Submittals Received
Email	428
Fax	2
Form Letters (15 types)	76,452
Form Letter, with additional comment (15)	4,671
Letter	139
Public Comment Form	28
Duplicate (same submittal, same person)	1,805
Total Submittals Received	83,525

Approximately 97 percent of the submittals consisted of 15 different form letters developed and submitted by various organizations and their members. Form letters were processed for specific comments one time; additional exact submittals were reported as part of the total submittals, but the comment was only coded once.

After processing the 83,525 submittals the BLM recorded a total of 8,695 unique comments (the significant difference in these numbers is a result of the high number of form letters). The comments by resource category are shown in descending order below.

Comment Resource Category	Total #
Water Resources	1,017
Economic Conditions and Values	899
Affected Persons and Groups	872
Minerals	796
Natural Environment	636
Social Conditions/Values	628
Miscellaneous	572
Laws, Policies	553
Cumulative Impacts	550
Lands	539
Health and Safety	373
Wildlife General	253
Alternatives	174
Recreation	158
Air Quality	132
Scenery, Visual Resources	111
Vegetation	110
Species of Concern	72
Anthropological Heritage and Cultural Resources	71
Natural Resources	52
Transportation	48
Aquatic Wildlife	12
Noise	7
Environmental Justice	3
Total Comments	8,695

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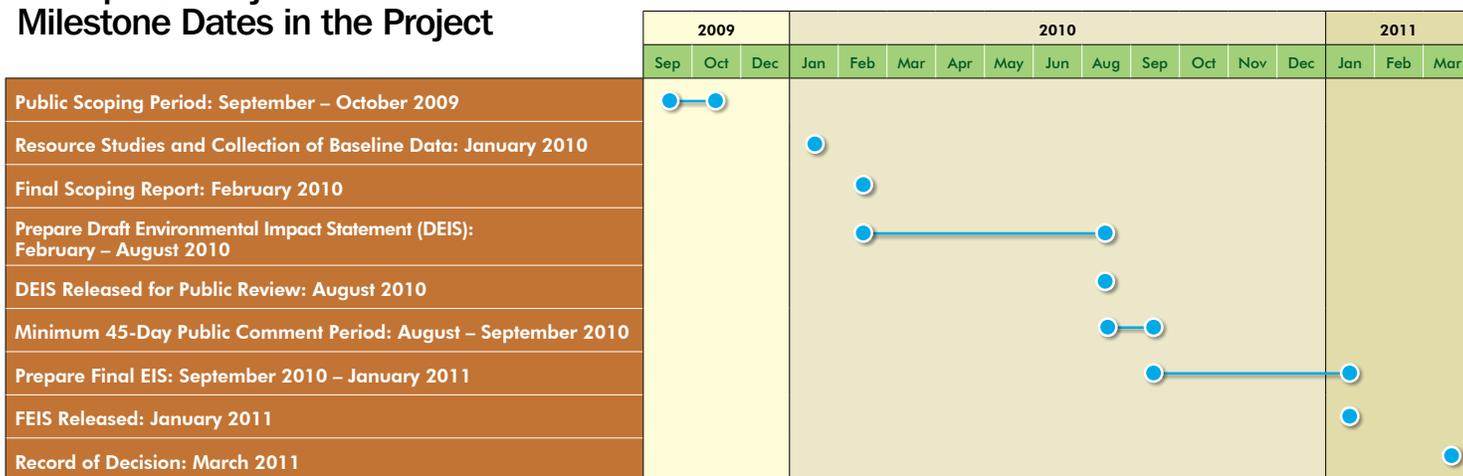




Public Scoping Report Now Available (continued)

You are encouraged to consult the Scoping Report for more specific details about the comments the BLM received regarding the Northern Arizona Proposed Withdrawal EIS. The full text of the Scoping Report is available at: <http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/mining/timeout.html>

Anticipated Major Milestone Dates in the Project



What Are Breccia Pipes and How Are They Mined?

The proposed action to be evaluated in the EIS is to withdraw all federal mineral estate in the segregation areas from the location of new mining claims under the Mining Law of 1872 for a period of 20 years. As part of evaluating the proposed withdrawal, the BLM considers it important to describe for the public the general nature of the mineral deposits and the type of mining activity that occurs in the study area. This brief article is an attempt to present key information about uranium mining in northern Arizona. Other articles related to the EIS and to soliciting public input on the project will follow in subsequent newsletters.

While uranium can be found in many parts of the world, certain areas have higher concentrations; the Arizona Strip of the Colorado Plateau is one of those areas. The Colorado

Plateau is made up of many different layers of rock formations. One of the deepest rock formations in the Colorado Plateau is called Redwall Limestone. As is typical of all limestones, the Redwall Limestone began to dissolve eons ago in places where it came in contact with slightly acidic groundwater. Over time, groundwater continued to flow through and settle within the Redwall Limestone, and the dissolved pockets within the formation eventually collapsed. With no support from below, the rock layers above the dissolved limestone then collapsed into vertical columns (or pipes) of broken rock known as breccia pipe. It is within these breccia pipes that uranium can sometimes be found (Figure 1). The breccia pipes are typically about 300 feet wide and up to 3,000 feet in depth. It is estimated that thousands of breccias pipes may exist across the Colorado

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Breccia Pipes (Continued from Page 2)

Plateau, but only a small fraction have uranium minerals within them. To date, 10 breccia pipes have been mined for uranium on the Arizona Strip, resulting in the production of over 20 million pounds of uranium ore.

The uranium minerals are located in a very limited area of the pipes that is relatively far underground, generally deeper than 1,000 feet. Therefore, the open-pit or surface mining techniques with which most people are familiar cannot be used. Breccia pipe uranium mining operations therefore typically consist of erecting a “headframe” at the surface over one or more vertical shafts or tunnels which are excavated down to the breccia pipe formation. Horizontal tunnels (also known as “adits”) are constructed and uranium ore is excavated by miners working underground. Uranium ore typically contains less than 1 percent uranium. This type of mining presents the usual risks associated with underground mining along with the need to maintain adequate ventilation in order to prevent the build-up of radon gas and associated worker exposure.

No processing, or milling, of uranium ore occurs in Arizona. Since the 1980s, all mined ore has been transported to a facility in Blanding, Utah, for processing. Because breccia pipe uranium deposits are so widespread, transportation of ore to the mill is accomplished by heavy haul truck rather than by rail.

During the milling process, the uranium ore rock is crushed, and the uranium is dissolved out of the ore using either an acidic or alkaline chemical solution. Once extracted from the ore rock, the dissolved uranium is concentrated, filtered, and dried into a compound commonly referred to as “yellowcake.” Yellowcake can then be further refined for use in nuclear power plants, in medical applications, in weapons, and many other uses.

Because breccia pipes are limited in size and are nearly always mined using underground techniques, the surface disturbance tends to be relatively small — about 20 acres per mine — and temporary, usually lasting no more than 4 or 5 years. Some existing mining operations have been suspended and renewed one or more times as world uranium prices have fluctuated. After final cessation of a mine’s operations all waste rock is required to be backfilled into the mine and the site is then sealed, recontoured, and revegetated.

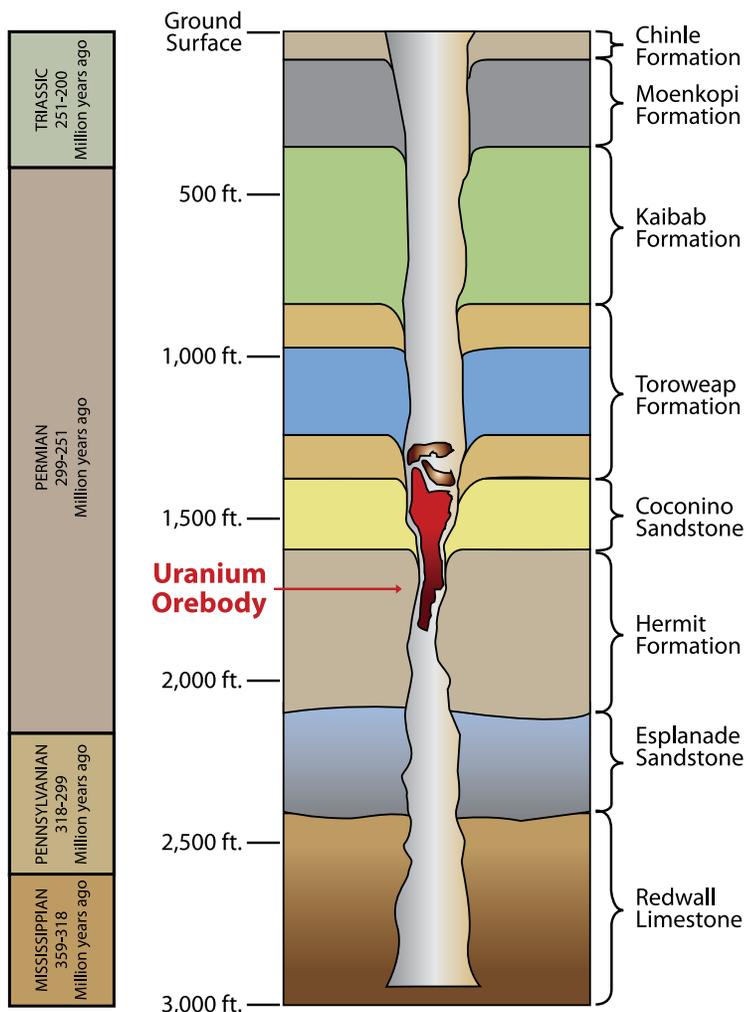


Figure 1. Typical breccia pipe formation

USGS Report Details Uranium Resources and Potential Effects of Uranium Mining Near Grand Canyon

As part of the Department of the Interior’s evaluation of whether to segregate nearly 1 million acres of federal lands near Grand Canyon National Park from new uranium mining claims, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) has released a multifaceted, 357-page report on uranium resources and potential impacts of uranium mining in northern Arizona.

The four major studies contained in the report evaluate uranium resources found in breccia pipe deposits and explore potential geological, hydrological, and biological issues related to uranium mining on BLM and Forest Service lands near the Park. The report, which can be downloaded as a single 194 MB file or by individual chapters, is available at: <http://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2010/5025/>



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