

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

October 6, 2016

Dear President Obama,

We are religious leaders who hope and pray for the thriving of the land, creatures, and communities of the Grand Canyon watershed. We believe that the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage area merits designation as a national monument, and we respectfully urge you to designate the area this year, before it is too late.

Our faiths teach us that all people are created in God's image, and we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. The waters of the Greater Grand Canyon area feed the Colorado River which provides drinking water for millions of people in Arizona, Nevada, and California. Uranium mining in the Grand Canyon Heritage area threatens clean water for God's creatures and communities in the Grand Canyon watershed. We have already seen the devastation of uranium mining on local communities' drinking water supplies, with cancer clusters developing among communities with few resources to cope. Many impacted communities waited far too long for justice, and some are still waiting. Today, there are too few mechanisms in place to ensure such tragedies will not reoccur.

Respect for Native culture and tribal rights is not only a stated value of our faith traditions, but also a value of our nation. In addition to the health of the watershed, this area holds cultural and religious significance to many tribes in the area. With more than 3,000 documented Native American archeological sites, some more than 12,000 years old, this land and the history it holds deserve national respect and recognition. Places like Red Butte, Yellowstone Spring, and Antelope Spring remain an integral piece of cultural identity for communities which have called the Grand Canyon watershed home for thousands of years. We stand with our indigenous neighbors to defend health, dignity, and justice for all.

Finally, as religious leaders, we embrace our responsibility to protect, restore, and rightly share all of God's creation. We must steward the gifts of the natural world wisely so that future generations of all God's creatures, including humans, can also enjoy its abundance. We encounter God in the natural world when we learn, play, and pray amidst what God has made. The wild beauty of the watershed's towering cliffs, deeply incised canyons and clear-flowing springs draw outdoor recreationists from around the world. Flora and fauna of this area such as the mule deer herd, the Kaibab squirrel, and Ponderosa pines count on the health of the web of God's creation for their future. We cannot fail them.

While short-term economic benefit may influence those who wish to exploit the natural gifts of the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage area, we must consider an alternative reality. Many of our faith traditions give us the spiritual resources to do so. Let us take this opportunity to make a monumental decision to protect this land, so many acts of stewardship may follow.

With Gratitude for Your Conservation Leadership,

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Phoenix, Arizona

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Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona

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Ghost Ranch Conference and Retreat Center
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Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics
Union Theological Seminary
Santa Fe, New Mexico (home residence)

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New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light
Santa Fe, New Mexico

The Right Rev'd Michael L. Vono, D.D.
Bishop
Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande
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Rev. Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower
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