

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – FEBRUARY 15, 2005

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### Utah outfitter association wants Moab tailings pile moved

At its annual meeting last week, Utah Guides and Outfitters Association (UGO) joined the call to move the Atlas tailings pile, citing the likelihood of catastrophic flooding that could send hazardous waste into the Colorado River at Moab and on downstream.

UGO represents more than 40 major river- and land-based recreation companies in the state, many of them in Southeast Utah. Members specialize in offering guided tours on public lands and waterways, and several UGO river managers have personal experience of high-water events.

In a letter to the U.S. Department of Energy, association president Denise Oblak pointed out that “catastrophic flooding on the Colorado River has happened in the past and it will happen again in the future.”

The pile was left after the closure of the Atlas uranium processing mill, in operation for more than four decades. Oblak wrote, “UGO members are taking this stand to point out what they see as obvious: hazardous waste stored on the bank of a major river is a very bad idea.”

As evidence of the likelihood of flooding, the letter mentioned the recent Santa Clara River flood, which destroyed 20 homes in Southwest Utah as the river swelled from 5 to 6,500 cubic feet per second in a matter of days.

The association says a flood that size on the Colorado could sweep some or all of the tailings pile’s 13 million tons of highly toxic waste downstream, contaminating culinary water for 26 million users, as well as the irrigation water for much of the country’s produce.

UGO also cited the threat to the Glen Canyon Dam at Lake Powell during the massive 1983-84 run-off. “Peak flows that year were not even at the level that would be expected from a 100-year or 500-year flood. If the river can threaten a concrete dam structure, it is not a huge stretch of the imagination to think it could potentially affect a dirt pile next to its shore.”

The outfitting group wants the pile moved to a permanent storage site at nearby Klondike Bluffs or Crescent Junction, because they are isolated and accessible by rail. UGO completely rejected the idea of capping the pile in place, and argued against moving the material by slurry line as a waste of water.

In its submission, UGO challenged the Dept. of Energy to abide by 1999 legislation that made it responsible for the pile, and which “contained a provision requiring the DOE to move the tailings away from the banks of the Colorado River and to clean up the groundwater.”

Finally, Oblak pointed out, “Of 21 similar tailings piles located throughout the nation, Moab’s pile is the only one that has not been moved. Nine of these 21 piles were located in flood plains, a risk factor that contributed to their removal. Why should the Moab Tailings Pile be treated differently? It should not.”

The public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement ends this Friday, February 18. Copies of the draft EIS are available at the Grand County library and online at <http://gj.em.doe.gov/moab>. Comments can be emailed to [moabcomments@gjo.doe.gov](mailto:moabcomments@gjo.doe.gov) or faxed to 970-248-7636.