



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

L3215 (GRCA 8211)

OCT 26 2011

Remarks by Superintendent David V. Uberuaga
Presented to the Tusayan Town Council on October 26, 2011, 6 pm, at the Grand Canyon
Best Western Squire Inn

Good evening – Chairman Bryan, Vice-Chairwoman Maniaci, and Council Members

My name is David Uberuaga, I am the Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park.

I am new to Grand Canyon, but I have lived and worked the last 27 years in a National Park Gateway Community. I have won national awards for assisting these communities with their economic viability. I understand theirs, and your needs, and appreciate the pressure to grow and provide more visitor services in a high visitor use area.

I am here tonight to address the Tusayan Town Council regarding applications for a zoning change on three parcels of property owned by the Stilo Development Group, and a request for annexation of over 5,600 acres of land as part of a development plan being proposed by the Stilo group. Of the acreage proposed for annexation, 196 acres comprise the Ten-X property, the remainder are public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

As the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park – one of the State's greatest assets, a world class destination, and World Heritage Site, I have great concerns over the proposal and the decision that lies before you.

The national park system was created to conserve unimpaired many of the world's most magnificent landscapes, places that enshrine our nation's enduring principles, and places that remind us of the tremendous sacrifices Americans have made, and continue to make, on behalf of those principles. They are the most remarkable collection of places in America for recreation and learning. Visitors can immerse themselves in places where events actually happened and enjoy some of the most significant natural and historic places in America. These are places that offer renewal for the body, the spirit and the mind.

The fundamental purpose of the national park system, established by the Organic Act, begins with a mandate to conserve park resources and values, and must be managed in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. National Park Service Managers must ALWAYS seek ways to avoid, or to minimize to the greatest extent practicable, adverse impacts on those park resources and values.

As one who has dedicated his professional life to that mission, I am here today to restate concerns over the actions before you tonight, concerns that have been expressed both in writing and verbally. We know that with annexation and subsequent rezoning of the properties owned by the Stilo Development Group, would come the possibility of significant development and increased visitation – creating tremendous demand on the park's limited resources. While we are not opposed to land owners developing their properties – we do have concerns on how that development might affect Grand Canyon National Park.

One resource in particular, WATER, is of great concern. Future development, especially development with intensive uses such as restaurants, hotels and residential communities, will be dependent on an adequate water supply. Additionally, the development of a water storage distribution system will become increasingly important for non potable uses and fire suppression as new development occurs. Resources in this area are in greatest jeopardy from depletions and contamination to ground water, seeps and springs, as well as alterations to cave and karst features. Not only are these resources the life blood of our communities, but to our native plant and wildlife as well.

An Environmental Impact Statement produced by the U.S. Forest Service in 1999 concluded that any water pumped out of the Coconino Plateau region would make less water available to support spring flow on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and on adjacent tribal lands. The extent of the effect and when it would occur is not well understood.

We have not heard from the developer on how they propose to adequately supply water for the amount of development that they are proposing or where that water is coming from. Additionally, we have not seen any estimates on potential growth in visitation to know what kind of effects there might be on other park resources, park infrastructure, or on visitor experience.

We do know, from their proposal, that there is a potential for up to 2,400 residential units, over 3 million square feet of commercial and hospitality space, and a possible increase in the residential population from 500 to as many as 8,000 residents in Tusayan.

In comparison, just over 2,000 people currently live in Grand Canyon (2010 Census for Grand Canyon/Tusayan 2,627). The park has approximately 433,000 square feet of commercial and hospitality space, which includes Phantom Ranch at the floor of the canyon. So the potential growth and scale of development under this proposal is significant!

With a large residential community on the boundary of the park, and with increased visitation will come additional operational demands on park infrastructure and staff that provide emergency services, law enforcement, visitor programs, maintenance and other visitor related services such as the visitor transportation system, and on the local clinic and school – both located within the park boundary.

Beyond water, wildlife, visitor experience, park infrastructure...and the long term impacts that can occur to these resources, we are also greatly concerned about park vegetation – such as the invasion and spread of exotic species; for cultural sites – knowing that increased development and additional roads can lead to looting of archeological sites both within and outside of the park; threats to proposed wilderness adjacent to the South Rim that could be impacted by degraded air quality, noise impacts to natural sounds, impacts to view sheds and vistas from installation of infrastructure, and clearing and grading for roads to name just a few. We are also concerned about large increases in visitation and local populations and how we might manage those with limited resources and an aging infrastructure. What will be the environmental and fiscal effects...we don't know, as no analysis has taken place, and concerns that we and others have expressed, have not been addressed in an adequate manner.

Ecological processes cross park boundaries, and park boundaries may not incorporate all of the natural resources, cultural sites, and scenic vistas that relate to park resources or the quality of the visitor experience. Therefore, activities proposed for adjacent lands may significantly affect park programs, resources, and values. Cooperative conservation beyond the park boundary is necessary as we strive to fulfill our mandate and protect these lands for future generations.

Any development on lands within Grand Canyon National Park would be subject to a high level of scrutiny and analysis. It is a legal requirement of all federal agencies – it allows us to consider alternatives to proposed actions, develop measures to mitigate environmental impacts and prepare environmental documents which disclose the impacts of proposed actions and alternatives. We understand that this process can be time consuming and costly process. However, when the risks are high to public assets, and the damage is permanent – it is a small price to pay for an informed decision.

I request that the Town Council take a step back before making this critical decision – let's make sure the decision is the right one. If it's the right decision today – it could still be the right decision in the future, but let's make sure it's an informed decision.

As a new town – you have a lot on your plate. You are assuming a lot of new responsibilities and fiscal realities. As a comparison, road repair and maintenance on Grand Canyon roads costs approximately \$1 million annually - \$2 million per mile for reconstruction, there are waste management costs, administrative costs...the list goes on. Is the Town Council ready to take on what comes with a project the size and scale as this? I know the park is not ready...

We respectfully request that prior to rendering a decision that the Town Council, Planning and Zoning Commission and the developer work with us and other concerned citizens to ensure that ALL concerns are considered and addressed adequately and in a manner that is appropriate for one of our nation's most valuable resources. We would like to have further discussion with you and the US Forest Service regarding this proposal before a decision is made and before you begin to move forward. We know you share our concerns over the experience that visitors from all over the world come here to enjoy, as well as concerns for the protection of our environment. We hope that by working together we can move forward in a manner befitting this community and Grand Canyon National Park.

Thank you for your time and consideration...we will look forward to a continued dialogue on this and other issues facing Grand Canyon and the Tusayan community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David V. Uberuaga". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

David V. Uberuaga
Superintendent