**SCRIPT— WATER DESK**

**TITLE: Billion-dollar uranium cleanup along Colorado River**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SUGGESTED LEAD-IN | **Crews are cleaning up a massive radioactive tailings pile in Moab, Utah, right next to the Colorado River, which provides water to tens of millions of people downstream.**  |
|   | In the Cold War, scientists scoured the nation to find uranium, a key ingredient for nuclear weapons. |
|  | That search led to Moab, Utah, where in 1956 construction began on a mill that processed uranium ore right next to the Colorado River, which now provides water to tens of millions of people and millions of acres of crops downstream. |
| Russell McCallister, Federal Cleanup Director | “When they established a mill, there wasn't very much thought given to protecting the river.” |
|  | Extracting the uranium left behind waste products and tailings—a radioactive sand-like material—that grew to more than 80 feet thick.After the mill’s owner declared bankruptcy in 1998, the federal government stepped in to clean up the site, considered at risk of flooding. |
|  | “So we're trying to protect basically the downstream constituents from this water flooding onto the tailings and moving it downstream.” |
|  | The tailings are dug up and hauled in steel containers to a disposal cell 30 miles north. It’s being capped by nine feet of soil and rock and it’s located far from any possible flooding that could pollute the Colorado River. |
|  | “It's a perfect area for a disposal cell if you were to pick one in the United States. It's very arid out there. Very limited rain, very limited vegetation.” |
|  | At the mill site, groundwater wells remove uranium, ammonia and other contaminants before they reach the river. |
| Mitch Tobin, The Water Desk | “After more than a decade of clean up at this site, which has already cost $600 million, work is expected to continue into the 2030s, when the final bill for federal taxpayers is projected to be $1 billion.”  |
|  | Local residents and downstream water users who pushed for the cleanup want to ensure funding for the program continues. In Moab, there’s already a plan to turn the site into a community asset once the massive project is done. |
|  | I’m Mitch Tobin, reporting for The Water Desk. |
|  |   |