



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Resources and Development Committee reviews proposal for uranium waste repository at Ambrosia Lake Valley



The Resources and Development Committee deliberated a report regarding a proposed waste repository in Ambrosia Lake Valley, N.M.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, Aug. 25, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) received a report from the Eastern Navajo Land Commission (ENLC) and the Navajo Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) regarding a proposed uranium waste repository in Ambrosia Lake Valley, New Mexico.

ENLC Executive Director Leonard Tsosie presented a resolution supporting the designation of Ambrosia Lake Valley as a centralized, long-term regional repository for abandoned uranium mine waste originating from the Navajo Nation. He explained that the ENLC convened on Friday, Aug. 22, to consider and approve the resolution.

NEPA Executive Director Stephen Etsitty provided an overview of decades-long uranium waste cleanup efforts, citing two congressional hearings (in 1993 and 2007), and emphasizing that federal agencies recognize the need for proper cleanup and disposal of Abandoned Uranium Mine (AUM) waste.

“We’ve been looking for all manner of alternatives, and since May, we’ve been approached by several private companies willing to work with us,” Etsitty said.

He noted the scale of the challenge, referencing an estimated 15,000 abandoned uranium mines nationwide. In 2013, the U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE) identified 4,225 aban-

doned uranium mines that supplied ore for U.S. atomic energy defense activities. Most of these AUMs are concentrated in northern New Mexico. Currently, NEPA and USEPA are addressing the cleanup of 46 high-priority sites on the Navajo Nation.

Etsitty also outlined funding status for the cleanup efforts, highlighting the TRONOX bankruptcy settlement that supports EPA-led cleanup projects for 55 AUMs formerly owned by Kerr-McGee Corporation on or near the Navajo Nation. \$1.028 billion dollars were awarded in 2014, with payments finalized in 2015.

He further noted BHP/Rio Algom involvement in the Grants-Milan area, where the company expressed willingness to collaborate on development of a long-term radioactive waste repository on lands it now owns; but BHP does not want to assume long-term waste management responsibilities, they would like to transfer that responsibility to the federal government.

He stressed that a proposed Ambrosia Lake Valley project would fall under the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act (UMTRCA). There are multiple UMTRCA facilities currently under USDOE long-term management in Ambrosia Lake Valley.

The Navajo Nation, he said, continues to work with BHP and federal agencies to identify and secure land for a viable repository.

“The waste material proposed for disposal in Ambrosia Lake will be treated with high-pressure slurry ablation (HPSA) technology,” Etsitty explained. “The lesser volume of the treated material, which will have higher concentrations of uranium, will be transported off the Nation for recycling. The remaining treated waste—less toxic and with less contaminants—will be disposed in the proposed repository. The HPSA treatment technology also significantly decreases the potential of treated material to contaminate groundwater.”

RDC members voiced strong support for the proposal. Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw emphasized the importance of presenting this information at upcoming meetings with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and with congressional leaders. She also recommended that the committee prepare a resolution of support for the Ambrosia Lake Valley location.

Council Delegate Danny Simpson urged the committee to act quickly, stressing the need to partner with BHP to secure approximately 14,000 acres of private land necessary for the project.

“What we’re pushing for is not just for the Eastern Agency,” Simpson said. “The proposal for Ambrosia Lake will help all communities and accommodate waste from 500 mines across the Navajo Nation.”

RDC Chair Brenda Jesus thanked the presenters for their proactive efforts, stating, “This initiative supports the health and environmental priorities of the Navajo people.”

The committee voted unanimously, three in favor and none opposed, to accept the report on the proposed Ambrosia Lake Valley uranium waste repository.

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