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MT TAYLOR MINE CLOSING

Rio Grande Resources Abandons “Re-Activation” Plan

Santa Fe – In a stunning victory for Native communities, Rio Grande Resources (RGR), owner of the Mt Taylor uranium mine, notified the Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department of “cessation of mining operations” and RGR’s intention “to begin closure plan activity.”

Eric Jantz, Staff Attorney at the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, which has been representing the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment (MASE) and Amigos Bravos on the Mt Taylor permitting, said,

“The frontline communities are thrilled about this development because they have been living with the mine for so long. We are all happy that RGR and MMD are finally facing the reality that the Mt Taylor Mine is not economically feasible or environmentally sustainable and we are looking forward to a thorough remediation process.”

Susan Gordon, Coordinator for MASE, an alliance of five organizations representing uranium-mining impacted communities, three of which are Pueblo- or Navajo-based. echoed Jantz’ comment:

“The RGR Corporation was able to fool the NM Mining Commission into believing that they were serious about reopening the Mt. Taylor Mine. The Commission refused to let MASE and Amigos Bravos present economic information that proved it was not fiscally possible for the company to make money. This was simply an effort to keep their Zombie Mine floating to convince their international investors and make more money. Even with the recent listing of Uranium as a strategic national resource, it is no longer possible to pretend that uranium mining will return to New Mexico. It is way past time to start the

cleanup and closure of the Mt Taylor Mine. The economic opportunities for the Grants Mining District are the jobs that will be created when cleanup and remediation begin.”

RGR had been granted Return to Active status under their permit on December 29, 2017. The mine had been in Standby status since 1999.

MASE and Amigos Bravos appealed the permit revision. After hearings on May 5, 2018, the Mining Commission issued their Final Order on Aug 1, 2018, upholding the Return to Active status. The two organizations then appealed that ruling to the First Judicial District Court in Santa Fe; when that court upheld the Mining Commission decision, the groups appealed to the State Court of Appeals, where the case is currently located.

According to RGR,

“From initiation of the closeout contracting process to completion of the closeout activities on site is estimated to take about 16 months. The first 5-6 months would be taken up by project management and contractor procurement, followed by 9-10 months of actual construction activities on site from mobilization through demobilization.”

Laura Watchempino, Acoma Pueblo member of MASE and the Laguna-Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment, noted,

“Closure of the Mt. Taylor mine is heartening news for this very sacred and unique landscape. We hope that the healing of this site can now take place with effective cleanup measures designed to restore the underground aquifers and remove all contaminated waste piles and infrastructure. Unfortunately, some of the damages to this site are permanent and irreversible, which is why no new mines should be permitted within the San Mateo Creek Basin.”

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- RGR Closeout Plan Activities Letter to MMD (<https://nmeic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/191203-RGR-Closeout-Plan-Activities-Letter.pdf>)
- RGR Closeout Plan quote: Rio Grande Resources Corporation, January 1998 (rev August 2103), Mt. Taylor Mine Closeout/Closure Plan, p34 (http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/MMD/MARP/documents/MtTaylor_Rev13-2_StandbyToActive_CI002RE_CCPTText_Tables_Figures.pdf)