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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

February 17, 2026

Re: New Mexico Mining Watch comments on Mining Operations and Reclamation Plan and request for hearing on Permit No. CI008RN, La Jara Mesa Mine

Dear Director McCullough:

On behalf of New Mexico Mining Watch (“NMMW”), please accept the following comments on Laramide Resources, Inc.’s (“Laramide”) proposed Mining Operations and Reclamation Plan (“MORP”). NMMW hereby also requests that the Mining and Minerals Division hold a public hearing on the MORP and the new mine application for Permit No. CI008RN. Additionally, the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, which is a member of NMMW, hereby renews its request that the Mining and Minerals Division holds a public hearing on the application for Permit No. CI008RN, initially made in July, 2024.

New Mexico Mining Watch is a statewide coalition of non-profit, public interest and community organizations dedicated to protecting New Mexico’s land, air and water from the impacts of mineral extraction projects. NMMW represents a broad range of Native and non-Native communities effected by historic and current mining operations.

Based on NMMW’s review of the MORP, NMMW has significant concerns about Laramide’s willingness and ability to operate its proposed mine in a way that protects

the environment, public health, and Mt. Taylor's¹ cultural integrity. To the extent NMMW can offer technical comments based on an incomplete MORP, NMMW provides the following:

I. The MORP is Incomplete

As a preliminary matter, NMMW disagrees with MMD's determination that the MORP is administratively complete. For example, Appendix A to the MORP, which contains design drawings of various features of the proposed mine such as waste retention ponds, planned surface facilities and proposed drainage plans are only 60% designs leaving almost half of the technical designs to be determined at some unspecified future date. It is unclear whether the remaining 40% design plans would be subject to public notice and opportunity to comment. Additionally, Laramide has deferred numerous important aspects of mine planning until an unspecified time in the future. Those deferred plans include such significant and fundamental decisions as whether the mine is economically feasible, substantial tribal consultations, and mitigation plans to insure the mine does not affect Mt. Taylor's cultural integrity. *See*, MORP at 4, 39.

While NMMW understands that a permit applicant may not be able to provide every detail of its operations prior to breaking ground, Laramide's MORP is currently inadequate to the point of raising due process concerns. Neither NMMW nor any other interested member of the public can meaningfully comment on Laramide's proposed operations and reclamation based on the current MORP because there is simply insufficient information to do so.

Consequently, NMMW recommends that MMD withdraw its administrative completeness determination unless and until Laramide can provide a MORP that contains sufficient information about its proposed operations and reclamation to allow for meaningful public comment. Alternatively, NMMW recommends that MMD provide notice and an opportunity to comment on any subsequent operational or reclamation related information Laramide provides to MMD.

¹ The mountain is known by many names. For the sake of simplicity, NMMW will refer to the mountain by the name imposed by colonial powers – "Mt. Taylor."

II. The MORP is Technically Deficient

Related to NMMW's objection to MMD's determination of administrative completeness, the MORP is so technically deficient that meaningful comment at this time is impossible.

A. Uranium Ore Storage Plans are Deficient

As noted above, the first phase of Laramide's proposed operations involve exploratory activities, including bulk sampling. MORP at 10. Bulk sampling will involve extracting 40,000 to 50,000 tons of "uranium-mineralized material" that Laramide will "temporarily" store on the surface of a compacted clay liner on the waste rock dump outside the mining area prior to transport to the mill for testing². *Id.* Laramide claims hauling to offsite testing facilities will be "conducted periodically" to eliminate need for a large stockpile.

During the proposed production phase, Laramide will transport ore in trucks and Laramide will place the ore on the clay-lined pad while awaiting transport to the mill. MORP at 12. The pad created by waste rock will be used to store the mineralized material (ore) prior to off-site shipment. *Id.* at 17, Table 2-5, note 3.

The MORP states that uranium ore will be stored outside the mine on a waste rock pad before being trucked offsite to the mill. The MORP does not indicate how the ore piles or bulk sampling piles will be protected from wind and precipitation, which could spread radioactive material across the landscape and leach radioactive and toxic materials into the ground.

B. The MORP does not Account for Climate Change Impacts

While the MORP provides some information about stormwater management, Laramide has not provided any indication that it considered the effects of climate change in calculating the capacity of its stormwater retention ponds. While on average, climate

² As described below, Laramide proposes to dig its exploratory tunnels through the Westwater and Recapture formations, both of which contain uranium, radium and heavy metals that have significant negative health effects when inhaled or ingested. This makes the need for detailed and rigorous plans to ensure the bulk samples are protected from wind and precipitation all the more important.

change will likely create hotter and drier conditions in New Mexico, it will also cause more violent precipitation events. The MORP provides no information about how Laramide anticipates preventing stormwater runoff in periods of intense short-term precipitation.

Additionally, and more important, Laramide provides no plans for preventing or containing fire. As noted above, New Mexico's increasingly hotter and drier climate makes the threat of catastrophic wildfires more likely. The MORP provides no indication of how Laramide intends to prevent fires or any plans for containing a fire should it cause one. The absence of a wildfire mitigation plan seems particularly glaring in the context of blasting activities in Phase I of the proposed operation. This is particularly concerning for NMMW members who are homeowners in the area because the risk of wildfire affects their ability to obtain or maintain homeowners' insurance. See, e.g., Lohmann, Patrick, *Fires Making Home Insurance Unaffordable, Impossible NM Lawmakers Say*, Source NM (Aug. 21, 2024), available at: <https://sourcenm.com/2024/08/21/fires-making-home-insurance-unaffordable-impossible-nm-lawmakers-say/> (last viewed, Feb. 16, 2026).

C. Laramide Provides Insufficient Information about Water use and Acquisition

The MORP indicates during mine production, water use is substantial: 61 gallons per minute or 29,472 gallons in an eight-hour day. *Id.* at 22, Table 2-6. Laramide further states that in the drier seasons, it assumes a "3,000 gallon capacity water truck applying[a] full water load each hour 5 – 8 hours per day during dry periods". *Id.* at Table 2-6, note 4. A full thirty-day month of continuous work would consume 2.712 acre feet, or nearly 800,000 gallons, of water. This amounts to 9.6 million gallons of water use per year or 57.6 to 172.8 million gallons of water use over the proposed 6 to 18 years of mine operations. The MORP does not indicate where Laramide will obtain this much water, whether it has rights to obtain the water, or whether obtaining water on this scale is even possible. NMMW requests that MMD require demonstrate proof, such as water rights confirmed by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer, that it has access to sufficient water to conduct its proposed operations and reclamation.

D. Laramide's Hydrological Analysis is Deficient

Laramide claims its proposed project will have no impact on groundwater. MORP at 39, § 4.1.3; 42, § 4.1.8. However, Figure 2-1³ indicates that in order to reach the target mineralized zone in the Poison Canyon formation⁴, Laramide will have to tunnel through the Westwater and Recapture formations, both of which are known to contain groundwater within the region. MORP at 5, Fig. 2-1. Before MMD should consider the MORP complete, it should require Laramide to confirm that its operations will not affect groundwater by completing the appropriate tests to establish the lack of groundwater in the mine area.

III. **The La Jara Mesa Project Should be Considered an Exploration Project Rather than a New Mine Project**

According to the MORP, Laramide is unsure of whether the proposed mine is commercially viable and must conduct exploratory activity to make a viability determination. *Id.* at 2. Indeed, the entire purpose of Phase I of the mining project is to determine whether the mine is economically viable. *Id.* at 4. Laramide admits that should this exploratory phase reveal the proposed mine is not economically viable, it will not proceed with constructing the mine and begin reclaiming from exploration activities. *Id.* Because of this uncertainty and the likelihood that Laramide will be unable to provide financial assurance for the entire mine (see comment, below) and perhaps even for exploration, NMMW urges MMD to treat Laramide's new mine application and MORP as an application for an exploration permit. Only after Laramide has confirmed that the proposed La Jara Mesa project is economically viable should MMD consider a new mine permit application.

IV. **Laramide is Unlikely to be able to Obtain Financial Assurance for Reclamation**

Laramide is unlikely to be able to obtain financial assurance for reclamation. Laramide's ability to obtain financial assurance for Phase I of the La Jara Mesa mine

³ This figure is identical to Figure 9 on page 17 of Laramide's revised *Technical Report on La Jara Mesa Uranium Property, Cibola County, New Mexico* (July 23, 2007).

⁴ The MORP does not indicate that the Poison Canyon formation is the target zone of the mine. However, Laramide's revised *Technical Report on La Jara Mesa Uranium Property, Cibola County, New Mexico* repeatedly states the minerals Laramide seeks to extract ore from that formation.

project, which is exploratory work, is highly questionable. Its inability to obtain financial assurance for the entire project is almost certain. In Phase I, the mine exploratory phase, Laramide intends to construct two parallel tunnels, fifteen feet wide by twelve feet high, 5,000 feet into La Jara Mesa using the drill and blast method. United States Forest Service, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the La Jara Mesa Mine Project* at 20-21 (March, 2012) (“DEIS”). A back-of-the-envelope calculation using <https://calcforge.com/cost>, reveals each tunnel would cost approximately \$113.4 million to dig, for a total of \$226.8 million (US) for both. At the same time, Yahoo Finance shows that Laramide’s value (market cap) is \$229.73 million (Canadian). See, <https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/LAM.TO/key-statistics/> (last viewed Feb. 11, 2026). Using the current exchange rate⁵, Laramide’s value is just under \$170,000,000 U.S. Thus, the cost of digging the exploratory tunnels alone substantially exceeds Laramide’s entire value, making it a significant risk for any potential bondholder or insurer. The above costs do not include the cost of any other tunnels Laramide may need to construct to complete its exploration or the cost of any of Laramide’s other mining projects. Those costs undoubtedly increase any bond-holder’s or insurer’s risk.

A generous interpretation of Laramide’s MORP is that it represents the baseless optimism of a severely undercapitalized junior mining company that wants to receive permit approvals with minimum friction. A more cynical (or perhaps realistic) interpretation is that Laramide needs to attract investors in order to even begin exploration on the La Jara Mesa project and an approved MORP and permit would help it do so.

MMD should not be in the business of validating baseless hopes or assisting a corporation recruit capital. NMMW recommends that MMD require Laramide to produce proof that it is able to obtain third-party financial assurance before MMD expends any further taxpayer resources on evaluating the MORP or Laramide’s permit application.

⁵ <https://wise.com/gb/currency-converter/cad-to-usd-rate?amount=100> (last viewed Feb. 11, 2026).

V. The MORP Contains no Information About the Steps Laramide will take to Protect Mt. Taylor's Cultural Integrity

Undoubtedly the most troubling aspect of the proposed La Jara Mesa mine is the fact it will inarguably and irrevocably adversely affect the Mt. Taylor Traditional Cultural Property. *See, e.g.,* United States Forest Service, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the La Jara Mesa Mine Project* at 152-163. As the DEIS acknowledges, in the U.S. Forest Service's consultations with tribes for whom Mt. Taylor has cultural significance, the tribes' primary concern, collectively, is that the proposed mine will negatively affect the mountain's sacred integrity and therefore interfere with or possibly eliminate aspects of cultural and religious practices. *Id.* at 154-157.

Several of NMMW's member groups consist of Indigenous people for whom Mt. Taylor has cultural significance. As indicated in the DEIS, for these NMMW members, Mt. Taylor, including La Jara Mesa, are part of living, ongoing cultural and religious practices. DEIS at 156-157. NMMW is concerned that the proposed mine will significantly interfere with and potentially eliminate their Tribal members' ability to engage freely in cultural and religious activities.

Indeed, in gathering information to support the nomination of Mt. Taylor as a traditional cultural property, the U.S. Forest Service compiled a compelling case that large industrial extraction projects like the proposed La Jara Mesa mine should not be permitted at all. *See, generally, Benedict, Cynthia and Hudson, Erin, Mt. Taylor Traditional Cultural Property Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of History Places, Report No. 2008-03-021 (Feb. 4, 2008) ("Benedict Report").* The Benedict Report makes clear that industrial extraction projects on Mt. Taylor generally and on La Jara Mesa in particular represent an existential threat to Indigenous cultural practices. For example, Mt. Taylor and its surrounding features, including La Jara Mesa, are central to the Pueblo of Acoma's cultural practices as a living community and maintaining its members' cultural identity. Benedict Report at 17.

Similarly, Mt. Taylor plays a central role in Navajo cosmology and the Navajo people consider the mountain and its surrounding areas a spiritual stronghold. *Id.* at 19. La Jara Mesa, in particular, has deep cultural significance to Navajo people. *Id.* The mesa is integral to the Navajos' cosmology and creation narrative. *Id.*

People of the Pueblo of Laguna, according to the Benedict Report, believe that since the Creator Mother gave them Mt. Taylor to live and prosper as a people, to desecrate it is dangerous and can lead to unforeseen consequences and ultimately extinction. *Id.* at 23.

For members of the Pueblo of Jemez, Mt. Taylor is crucial to their cultural practices. *Id.* at 25. Cultural practices are tied to specific locations on and near Mt. Taylor and cultural practitioners cannot simply choose another location if a culturally significant location is disturbed or destroyed. *Id.* Alteration of traditional cycles and practices will affect the community's cultural beliefs and diminish their effectiveness and power. *Id.*

These are just a few examples of Mt. Taylor's and its surrounding mesas' cultural, ceremonial and religious significance. The need for protecting its integrity by the strongest measures possible cannot be overstated. Failure to do so will result, at a minimum, in illegal and unconstitutional restrictions on religious freedom and, at worst, ethnocide.

However, Laramide's operational plans propose no actions that would mitigate or eliminate known concerns about the mine's cultural and religious effects. Such concerns include, but are not limited to: mine subsidence, which would permanently alter La Jara Mesa's surface; blowing radioactive dust; noise; visual impacts; and road construction. The MORP only provides that Laramide Minerals will conduct tribal consultations at some future time and may alter operations based on those consultations. MORP at 39.

Laramide's vague promises are insufficient to insure compliance with all relevant laws and constitutional provisions, such as the U.S. and New Mexico Constitutions' guarantees of religious freedom; the obligation of the United States and all subordinate governments, including state governments, to abide by international and regional human rights treaty obligations; the federal (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000bb *et seq.*) and New Mexico (NMSA, 1978 §§ 28-22-1 *et seq.*) Religious Freedom Restoration Acts and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000cc *et seq.*). Although MMD's primary responsibility is implementing and enforcing the New Mexico Mining Act, it cannot willfully ignore these other legal obligations, particularly those relating to constitutional rights.

Moreover, in New Mexico, we urge MMD to act as a backstop against the current climate of federal deregulation. MMD should therefore closely scrutinize and analyze La Jara Mesa mine's cultural and religious impacts.

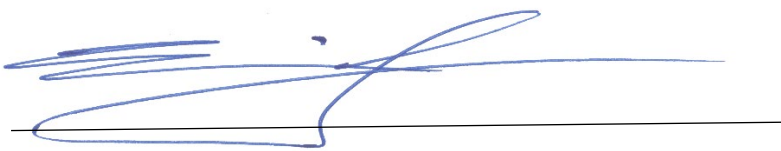
NMMW recommends that MMD forestall any further action on Laramide's permit application unless and until Laramide produces concrete measures, subject to public notice and comment, to protect Mt. Taylor's integrity as a cultural and religious site.

VI. Conclusion

Mt. Taylor's cultural and religious value is immeasurable. Its economic value as a recreational site is significant. Its value in providing ecosystem services is incalculable. All Cibola County residents and many New Mexicans outside Cibola County share these benefits.

The proposed La Jara Mesa mine will diminish all these values for the sake of minimal and highly speculative short-term economic gain for one mining company. Because of the extraordinary harm at stake and Laramide's woefully inadequate MORP, NMMW urges MMD to rigorously scrutinize Laramide's plans and maximize public involvement in its analyses.

Thank you for your consideration.



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