



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 6, 2012

MEDIA CONTACTS
Jerome Clark | 928.637.5603
Carmenlita Chief | 928.255.3428
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Resources and Development Committee engage in discussion with Pinon and Black Mesa regional communities on energy and environmental issues

RDC extends environmental monitoring permit for Peabody, receives report on proposed solar project

PINON, Ariz. — Members of the Resources and Development Committee traveled to Pinon Chapter on Tuesday where they convened for a regular meeting. The committee received a report regarding a proposed solar power demonstration project on Black Mesa, and passed a legislation pertaining to the extension of a Peabody Western Coal Company revocable use permit.

The RDC voted 3-0 to pass Legislation No. 0480-12, which approved the extension, modification, and reaffirmation of Peabody's revocable use permit for the operation and maintenance of eight environmental monitoring sites and monitoring site roads.

The permit will expire on May 31, 2015.

The legislation also included a rental adjustment for the eight sites which monitor water quality and other water measurements, according to the Navajo Minerals Department.

“The coal company has agreed to an increase in rent of approximately \$13,000 until the 2015 expiration date, and has already submitted its payment to the Navajo Nation as required by the Extension Modification and Reaffirmation of the revocable use permit,” said Council Delegate David Tom (Beclabito, Cove, Gadí i'áhi/Tó Koi, Red Valley, Sheepsprings, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnaózt'i'í), the legislation's sponsor.

Following presentation of the legislation, Council Delegates Leonard Pete (Chinle) and Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) both pressed Peabody Energy director of engineering services Randy Lehn for more information on monitoring site data that have been collected over the last ten years, and whether there were any causes for environmental concern that collected data may have suggested.

“What are these testing sites discovering? Is all okay, or is there something happening out there that needs to be addressed?” questioned Delegate Tsosie, adding that the committee has received reports from Diné residents of “sinkholes, depressions, and environmental damages.”

Lehn said the purpose of the permit is to monitor environmental issues, ensuring there is no environmental harm from mining operations.

Monitoring reports are sent to the Office of Surface Mining on a regular basis, and so far, there have been no damages found by OSM, stated Lehn.

However, Delegate Pete expressed disapproval over Peabody's failure to provide for the committee's review a summary report of monitoring data from the eight sites, which have been in place since the early 1980's.

"I do not have any problems with the sites, but we just need to be transparent with the people," said Delegate Pete, insisting that the coal company be better prepared with detailed report information when coming before the committee.

At the close of legislation discussion, Peabody Energy representatives were asked to return before the committee in January to deliver a thorough report addressing environmental monitoring concerns raised by Diné residents. The exact date has not yet been set.

Presentation of the legislation was then followed by a report on a proposed solar power project.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) introduced Wahleah Johns of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, who presented on the specifics of a proposed 1-5 MW solar power demonstration project to be built on Black Mesa reclaimed mine lands.

Johns said the purpose of the solar project is to demonstrate how solar energy works, show how lands can be repurposed using existing infrastructure, and to create a community co-ownership stake aiming to be profitable for local and Navajo Nation economies.

Revenue generation, job training, construction and operational jobs, and the creation of additional local and regional economy through the investment of funds generated through the project were all outlined as benefits.

Concerns colored with opposition were raised by a number of local residents belonging to an organization called Black Mesa United.

Some BMU members felt that local residents were being left out of the decision making process, having questions as to where the generated revenue would go and whether livestock grazing would be impacted around the solar project.

Although Delegate Pete nodded in support of the project's objectives, stating that at some point, it was time for the Nation to "become green and innovative," he was concerned by the "tug-of-war" amongst community groups regarding the project.

"How do we fix this?" asked Delegate Tsosie, who had also echoed concerns of community fractionation over discussions of economic development.

Regardless, Delegate Tsosie said he also supported the project.

"To me, this is a good project and a good idea. By building something like this, we begin to decrease our reliance on energy from outside companies," said Delegate Tsosie. "I think of this as an experiment as to how we can accomplish such goals."

The community organizations were encouraged to dialogue and work toward harmonious agreement.

###