



## The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Resources Committee, Navajo Abandoned Mine Lands discuss Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act at work session**

**FLAGSTAFF, Ariz.—** Last week, the Resources Committee held a joint work session with the Navajo Abandoned Mine Lands program and left the work session with a detailed plan on pressing issues needing attention, including the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

At the work session, Navajo Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) reported its \$38 million funding source is in jeopardy, which comes from the U.S. Treasury and coal taxes collected from coal production on the Navajo Nation. The Obama Administration is proposing to eliminate all funding and payments to AML programs pursuant to its 2011 Budget Proposal: *Termination, Reduction, and Savings: Budget of the U.S. Government Fiscal Year 2011*. Secondly, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement is producing a legislation to end funding for certified tribal and state AML programs, including Navajo AML by fiscal year 2012 and use those funds for high priority coal projects.

According to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) of 1977 and its 2006 amendments, the Navajo AML Program is mandated to receive payments from fees collected from current and past coal production on the Navajo Nation through 2022. Pursuant to the 2006 SMCRA amendments, Navajo AML said they will continue to respectfully request for funding from the federal government. In addition, Navajo AML is standing behind the fact that the Navajo Nation is "rightfully owed" money collected from resources taken off the Navajo Nation.

Madeline Roanhorse, department manager for Navajo AML, said her office is very successful with reclamation efforts.

"I am very confident in our data," Roanhorse said, reporting that 166 of 1032 uranium mines continue to be health hazard among Navajo people who live near downwind abandoned uranium mines. She also added that Navajo AML reclaimed and maintains 264 coal mines.

The work session also involved updates of SMCRA's Public Facility Projects (PFP), which focuses on infrastructure development at chapters impacted by abandoned uranium mines. Currently, the chapters of Cudei, Sweetwater and Whiterock have PFP in progress. Cudei Chapter has a Women & Children Home Shelter being developed and both Sweetwater and Whiterock Chapters are slated to receive power line extensions. Navajo AML said progress has been made through PFP.

In addition, Navajo AML provided updates on groundwater cleanup at the Monument Valley and Tuba City, Ariz., Shiprock, N.M. and Mexican Hat, Utah sites.

Council Delegate Norman John II, (Twin Lakes) thanked Navajo AML for their efforts. "You are all doing a great job," he said. "I am proud of your successful and ongoing efforts to clean the environment and grateful that AML helps to expand and improve communities across the Navajo Nation."

On June 9, the Intergovernmental Relations Committee passed a resolution opposing the proposed termination of funding to Navajo AML. The Resources Committee, along with Navajo AML, is scheduled to meet with congressional leaders to save these funding sources.

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