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President Shelly speaks at International Uranium Film Festival



Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly addressed the audience of the International Uranium Film Festival on Dec. 2, 2013. President Shelly gave an update on the Five-Year plan and current remediation efforts. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Panelists for the International Uranium Film Festival listen to remarks by President Shelly at the Navajo Nation Museum on Monday. The three-day festival featured screenings of 40 films from 15 countries. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK—On Monday, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly addressed the audience at the International Uranium Film Festival (IUFF) at the Navajo Nation Museum. The Navajo Nation banned uranium in 2005. In March 2013, President Shelly signed into law the Uranium Ore Transportation Protection Act, which banned

transportation of uranium on the Navajo Nation. In its third year, the IUFF was the brainchild of founder Norbert Suchanek and executive director Marcia Gomes de Oliveira. Forty documentaries from 15 countries were screened, exploring both the uranium and nuclear industries impact on the global community. “This year, there are

at least 10 films about the Navajo Nation and uranium, including some films by Navajo filmmakers,” President Shelly said.

Films depicting uranium mining on the Navajo Nation include “Dii’go To’ Baahaane: Four Stories About Water,” “Poison Wind” and “The Four Corners: A National Sacrifice Area?”

President noted that sharing the Navajo story on uranium was critical and that books like “If You Poison Us” and “Yellow

On July 16, 1979, an earthen dam at the United Nuclear Corporation uranium mill tailings facility collapsed, releasing 1,100 tons of radioactive tailings and 94 million gallons of toxic wastewater into the Puerco River.

The spill is the largest release of radioactive waste by volume in U.S. history and ranks second only to the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident in total radiation release. It contaminated the river for 80 miles, affecting Navajo

“The Northeast Church Rock Mine is the largest abandoned uranium mine on the Navajo Nation. It is approximately 145 acres.”

Dirt” brought awareness of the uranium legacy on the Navajo Nation to the forefront of the national consciousness.

In Navajo, uranium is referred to as “łeezh litso,” or yellow dirt.

President Shelly said, “The Northeast Church Rock Mine is the largest abandoned uranium mine on the Navajo Nation. It is approximately 145 acres.”

communities like Church Rock, Pinedale, Tseyatoh, and Ariz. communities as far away as Chambers.

Initial cleanup of the mine began in 2006. Residents living near the mine had their homes and yards screened and cleaned up. Additionally, contaminated soils were reconsolidated back to the former mine site. Land areas in the drainages east and north

of the site were also screened and cleaned up.

On Sept. 29, 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced its commitment to transport one million cubic yards of radium and uranium contaminated soil and waste from Church Rock to the nearby UNC mill site. The cost of the cleanup was \$44 million.

The mill site land is owned by the UNC and General Electric. It is a Superfund site undergoing remediation and will eventually be turned over to the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Legacy Management for long-term surveillance and remediation.

The U.S. EPA warned that exposure to elevated levels of radium over a long period of time can result in anemia, cataracts, and cancer, especially bone cancer.

"The Navajo Nation and the people living closest to this former uranium mine are resolved to see this clean up action completed," Shelly said. "Since 1985, we have been building our own technical capacity."

The Navajo Nation argued its case before Congress in 1993 and 2007, requesting resources for the Nation and federal agencies involved in the clean up effort. Congressional support came from Rep. Henry Waxman (Calif.) and Sen. Tom Udall (N.M.).

In April 2013, the

Navajo Nation expressed appreciation for the completion of the first multiagency Five-Year Plan from 2008 to 2012. President Shelly met with the U.S. EPA and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Feb., April and August 2013 for the timely approval of the final remedy for clean up of the Church Rock mine site.

President Shelly said the Navajo Nation received word in 2012 that the federal government would commit to a second Five-Year Plan to span from 2013 to 2017. The Navajo Nation submitted eight objectives and three recommendations for the new plan in April 2013, at the Uranium Stakeholders Workshop.

President formed a Uranium Task Force in 2012 to establish an advisory board or commission to assist the Navajo Nation in developing recommendation for disposal options and other policy issues.



President Shelly said the second Five-Year Plan will span from 2013 to 2017. He explained the Navajo Nation submitted eight objectives and three recommendations for the multiagency effort. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Robert Tohe from the Sierra Club addressed the audience as well and spoke of the need to educate the public on the repercussions of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation. He said coordinators envisioned the film festival to allow for dialogue with the public through a question and answer session. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



The negative impact of uranium mining has effects native tribes from across the globe. The International Uranium Film Festival originally began in Brazil over three years ago. (Photo by Rick Abasta)