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Communications Office  
Office of the President and Vice President  
Mihio Manus  
Michele J. Crank  
928.871.7000

**PRESIDENT BEGAYE AND VICE PRESIDENT NEZ DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY FROM US EPA AND OTHERS FOR GOLD KING MINE SPILL, ANNOUNCE NAVAJO LAWSUIT AGAINST RESPONSIBLE PARTIES**



During a press conference held Tuesday, Aug. 17, on the banks of the San Juan River, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye said “We demand compensation for our people, and we demand it now! The defendants should do the right thing and fix the mess they created.”

SHIPROCK-On Tuesday, Aug. 17, President Russell Begaye announced that Navajo Nation filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, its contractors, and mining companies for their misconduct and role in causing the Gold King Mine (GKM) spill. The lawsuit filed by the Nation’s counsel at Hueston Hennigan LLP seeks to hold these parties accountable for their acts and to obtain recovery for the Nation for the many harms caused by the spill.

“To this day, no one has been held accountable,” President Begaye said. “No one has anted up for causing this financial, cultural, and spiritual catastrophe to the Navajo people.”

At a press conference held on the banks of the San Juan River in Shiprock, N.M., President Begaye was joined by Vice President Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation Attorney General Ethel Branch, Navajo Nation Speaker LoRenzo Bates and Council Delegates Tom Chee and Amber Crotty.

The president said that for centuries Native Americans have fallen victim to environmental devastation at the hands of the Federal government and private industry. But the Nation will not allow this neglect, recklessness, or worse to go unanswered.

“We know it wasn’t just the responsibility of the US EPA. We know that contractors working the GKM were negligent and reckless. The owners of mines in this area who caused the buildup of toxic wastewater and left the mess for others to deal with, must also be held responsible,” he said.

Beyond the US EPA, the lawsuit names several defendants that include Environmental Restoration, and mining companies called Gold King Mines Corporation, Sunnyside Gold Corporation, and Kinross.

In bringing this lawsuit for the GKM disaster, Vice President Jonathan Nez said the Navajo Nation is fighting on behalf of all Native American tribes by holding the U.S. government and others accountable for this environmental catastrophe, which is one of many that have been committed against tribes for centuries.

In the wake of the Navajo Nation's announcement of their lawsuit, bipartisan Senators and Representatives have shown their support for the Nation.

Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) commended Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates for their relentless advocacy on behalf of their tribal members.

"The Navajo Nation has every reason to sue the EPA for its role in devastating hundreds of Navajo farms following the Gold King Mine disaster," he said.

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) issued a statement expressing his concerns with delays in compensation to the people of the Navajo Nation for costs and damages caused by the Gold King Mine spill.

"It's been over a year and families are still feeling the economic impacts and health uncertainties of the Gold King Mine spill," Senator Heinrich said. "The pace of reimbursement to those impacted by this terrible incident is unacceptable. The EPA must fully compensate victims of the spill for their losses and provide a better process for filing claims."

In a statement issued by U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.), she said she stands firmly with the Navajo Nation in their lawsuit against the EPA.

"The Gold King Mine spill was catastrophic for the Navajo people. Not only was it an environmental and economic disaster, it was a failure by the EPA on several fronts," she said. "First, the agency failed to respond swiftly and transparently. It failed to immediately engage the tribal government. And it failed to fully address the disaster's short- and long-term burdens on the tribe."

U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) issued a statement supporting the Navajo Nation's decision to pursue justice for ongoing damages.

"The Navajo people have been on the receiving end of devastating environmental disasters brought on by the federal government and private industry for far too long. The spill was an accident, but the EPA made several serious mistakes,



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and the Navajo Nation has every right to pursue its claims for damages in court," Senator Udall said. "This was not a natural disaster, and the communities that were harmed by the toxic spill deserve compensation."

House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member, Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.) urged EPA officials to quickly resolve the Nation's valid claims as the best and fastest way to protect the interests of the Navajo Nation and the agency itself.

"Dragging this process out for several years will not help the EPA or the Navajo Nation," Grijalva said. "Any crop not being planted and any water source not being restored to full potential is a missed opportunity. The longer this takes, the more animosity will build, and that's an outcome we should all work together to avoid."

President Begaye said initially the Navajo Nation trusted the US EPA and felt they were protectors of the environment. For the past year that trust has significantly eroded as has the treatment of the Navajo Nation by those who committed these acts.

"What have we asked for? Nothing more than full, fast, and fair recovery for the Navajo Nation and for the Navajo people. Yet each of our reasonable requests for relief has been delayed or denied. No more. We demand compensation for our people, and we demand it now! The defendants should do the right thing and fix the mess they created," said President Begaye.

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