



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

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Navajo Nation and Red Water Pond Road community residents oppose proposal to transfer uranium mine waste near the homes of Navajo residents



PINEDALE, N.M. – On Saturday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Executive Director Valinda Shirley met with members of Red Water Pond Road Community Association, which was founded in 2006 by Navajo residents residing near the Northeast Church Rock Mines, the Tronox Quivira Mines, and the United Nuclear Corporation Mill Site. The group spoke with President Nez regarding opposition to the transfer of uranium mine waste from the Northeast Church Rock abandoned uranium mines to the Mill Site, located approximately one mile from the border of the Navajo Nation.

President Nez, with the support of the association, requested a second extension for the comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, a document prepared by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission that describes the impacts on the environment as a result of a proposed license amendment for the United Nuclear Corporation Church Rock Project. The extension is crucial for Navajo communities to review and to provide comments.

“The Navajo people have endured decades of radiation exposure and contamination caused by uranium mining and production, and continues to impact the health of individuals, families, and communities. Together, we strongly oppose the proposed amendment that would allow the transfer of uranium mine waste and contamination just a short distance from the Navajo Nation and the homes of our Navajo people. Our administration has met with the U.S. EPA on numerous occasions and sent many letters to the U.S. EPA and congressional leaders to ensure progress with uranium mine clean-up efforts. Our small Navajo communities have suffered long enough, and the federal government needs to be held liable for all clean-up efforts,” said President Nez.

There are approximately 524 abandoned uranium mine sites on the Navajo Nation, and the Navajo Nation EPA estimates that there could be far more. Unfortunately, only 219 of these sites have available funds for clean-up and remediation efforts, leaving a total of 305 unaddressed sites that pose severe environmental and health hazards to surrounding areas and people.

During the meeting, many residents pleaded with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to remove the Northeast Church Rock Mine waste to an appropriate site far from the boundaries of the Navajo Nation. Residents said they do not want to witness another catastrophic event like the Church Rock Uranium Mill Trailing Spill of July 1979, which remains the most significant release of radioactive material in U.S. history.

“The abandoned uranium mines have severely impacted the Red Water Pond Road Community. Furthermore, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, prepared by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, found serious impacts to groundwater, public and occupational health, and historical and cultural resources from past uranium activities at all of the community’s mine sites. The Navajo Nation EPA continues to support the community through research, data collection, technical assistance, and to provide resources to improve the conditions,” said Shirley.

President Nez also stated that the Nez-Lizer Administration would continue to work closely with the U.S. EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan, who visited an abandoned uranium site in Cameron, Ariz. in September, to move remediation efforts forward safely.

“The Nez-Lizer Administration continues to advocate for Navajo families who continue to experience long-term health impacts due to radioactive contamination and exposure from abandoned uranium mines. We have to hold the federal government accountable and uphold the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act. We will continue to advocate this position for the health and wellness of our Navajo people,” added President Nez.

A follow-up meeting with the Navajo Nation EPA and Red Water Pond Road Community Association is scheduled this week to continue addressing the proposed license amendment.

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