

Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor
Melanie Kenderdine, Cabinet Secretary
Ben Shelton, Deputy Cabinet Secretary
Erin Taylor, Deputy Cabinet Secretary
Erin McCullough, Division Director

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Contact: Sidney Hill

Public Information Officer, EMNRD
sidney.hill@emnrd.nm.gov



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BLM wins state award for making deadly quarry safe
Las Cruces office recognized for eliminating 150-foot cliff hazards at hiking spot

SANTA FE – The Las Cruces District Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management won a state reclamation award this week for transforming a dangerous rock quarry near Las Cruces into a safer destination for the hikers who frequently visited the site despite its 150-foot unstable cliffs.

The New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division also recognized Chevron Mining, Inc. with a second 2025 Excellence in Reclamation award for restoring natural vegetation to an area where coal had been mined for nearly 50 years.

The Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) presented both awards at the annual New Mexico Mining Association Conference, which took place Sept. 7 to 9 at the Drury Plaza Hotel in Santa Fe.

“Helping organizations turn former mines into safe, useable public spaces is among our most important missions,” said **MMD Director Erin McCullough**. “We are especially proud to have played a part in mitigating safety hazards at the former rock quarry. This project lowers the chances of a tragedy occurring in that area.”

Making a dangerous site safe

The former rock quarry sits outside the boundary of the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument and adjacent to the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument, approximately 7.5 miles north of Las Cruces. Known as Community Pit No. 1, the quarry provided highly-quality stone for construction projects from 1969 to 2007.

After its closing, BLM staff frequently spotted visitors climbing on or underneath the quarry's walls, some of them 150 high, and all consisting of unstable, loose rock. In September 2024, BLM launched a three-phase project to make the site less dangerous for visitors.

The first two phases involved mitigating a cliff hazard by removing material from and regrading the roughly 50-acre site. The third phase was reseeding the entire area and applying mulch to its lower slopes. Additional work included prepping the soil to retain water and promote plant growth. BLM also did public outreach to ensure the public understood why the site had been altered.

Reclaiming part of a coal mine

The Chevron Mining project reclaimed a portion of the McKinley Mine near Gallup. The coal mine started operations in 1962 and discontinued production in 2010. Over that time, the operation extracted approximately 200 million tons of bituminous coal and disturbed approximately 12,600 acres of land.

Chevron's award-winning project reclaimed a 56-acre parcel 23 miles northwest of Gallup and near the Navajo Nation's southern boundary.

Waste from the mine had been cast over virgin ground in this area, causing a steep, excessive dirt build-up. The area's topography—including the loose soil, a narrow road that had been used to haul coal and a nearby drainage arroyo—made the reclamation effort challenging.

Chevron contracted Water and Earth Technologies, Inc. and Habitat Management, Inc. to develop a hydrologic reconstruction plan, which the MMD approved. The contractors deployed specialized software to create models of the area and ultimately designed new watersheds that tie into a second preexisting arroyo and reshaped the land. The reshaped land was then covered with new topsoil and vegetation native to the area was planted and continues to flourish.

"Reclaiming mines builds trust within those local communities," said **McCullough**. "It is an honor to recognize the extraordinary talent and care that our award recipients have invested in these two New Mexico communities."

About the Excellence in Reclamation Awards

Since 1996, the Excellence in Reclamation Award has recognized innovative techniques for coal, hard rock, and aggregate mine reclamation, abandoned mine land reclamation projects, and other related efforts deserving special recognition. The award presentation and information on previous award winners are posted on MMD's website [here](#).

MMD reminds citizens that abandoned mine features contain nothing of value, are unstable, and pose serious danger. Please avoid them.



Smoothing out this former rock quarry in Doña Ana County earned the Las Cruces District Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management a 2025 Excellence in Reclamation Award.

The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.
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