

State of New Mexico
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

Susana Martinez
Governor

David Martin
Cabinet Secretary-Designate

Brett F. Woods, Ph.D.
Deputy Cabinet Secretary

Fernando Martinez, Director
Mining and Minerals Division



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Media Contact: Jim Winchester 505-231-8800 E-mail: Jim.Winchester@state.nm.us

Harding Pegmatite Mine Project Receives National Award

A New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program project that safeguarded dangerous mine openings at the heavily visited Harding Pegmatite Mine in Taos County has been recognized on the national level.

The National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAMLPL) presented the Harding Pegmatite Mine Safeguard Project with the Small Projects Award during its national conference recently in Daniels, West Virginia.

The NAAMLPL membership, consisting of AML programs from 31 states and tribes, selected this year's award winners for their exemplary work in abandoned mine sites impacted by mining that took place prior to 1977.

"I'm pleased that the Abandoned Mine Land Program was recognized for the important work it does to safeguard dangerous mine sites in New Mexico," said Fernando Martinez, Mining and Minerals Division Director.



One of the Bat Compatible Closures at the Harding Pegmatite Mine

The \$206,700 project, constructed in June through August 2011, safeguarded ten hazardous mine openings, nine with bat compatible closures that allow bats to continue to use the underground mine workings for night roosting and hibernation. The closures also allows the University of New Mexico, owner of the mine site, to control access to the site and mine workings for geology students, researchers, and other visitors. Three to four thousand people visit the site each year.

Dr. Adrian Brearley, Professor and Chair of the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, University of New Mexico, stated that, "I see this project as a significant milestone in the history of the mine that will help preserve the mine as an important educational resource for New Mexicans and our visitors from elsewhere in the United States and from around the world."

There were three periods of mining at the Harding Pegmatite between 1919 and 1958. Lepidolite, which provided lithium mica for glass production, was mined in the 1920s. During World War II, microlite was mined to supply tantalum for use in the advanced electronics of the period, such as walkie talkies. During the Cold War era in the 1950s, beryl was mined as a source of beryllium, which is used primarily in military applications, including those related to the manufacture of thermonuclear weapons. Between 1949 and 1958, the mine's beryl was all shipped to Los Alamos Laboratories.

In 1978, Dr. Arthur Montgomery, a PhD. geologist and mine owner since 1942, generously donated the mine to the University of New Mexico. Because of the strategic importance of its minerals, it took an act of Congress to transfer ownership. In the legislation, Congress reserved the federal government's authority to order the mining of strategic minerals at the mine when necessary.

New Mexico's Abandoned Mine Land Program works across the state on both public and private lands to identify dangerous abandoned mine areas and to abate the hazards and restore abandoned mine lands degraded by historic coal mining. The Program is funded by the U.S. Department of the Interior through a fee on active coal production.

It is estimated there are more than 15,000 mine hazards scattered throughout New Mexico that remain un-reclaimed. The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program has closed more than 4,000 hazardous mine openings over the past 22 years and reclaimed numerous mine waste piles. Inactive or abandoned mine sites are extremely hazardous and potential visitors to these sites are advised to exercise extra caution when exploring these areas. The best safety practice to follow is to "Stay Out and Stay Alive."

For information regarding mine safeguarding and reclamation or the New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program, contact John A. Kretzmann, P.E., AML Program Manager, Mining and Minerals Division, (505) 476-3423 or John.Kretzmann@state.nm.us.

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