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EMNRD Mining and Minerals Division Presents 2022 Excellence in Reclamation Awards

SANTA FE, NM – The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department’s (EMNRD) Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) is proud to honor Navajo Transitional Energy Company, LLC, as recipient of the 2022 Excellence in Reclamation Award.

Instituted in 1996, the Excellence in Reclamation Award recognizes excellence and innovation in coal, hard rock and aggregate mine reclamation and abandoned mine land reclamation projects. The awards also aim to raise public awareness of mining issues through outreach projects conducted around the state. EMNRD presents the awards at the annual New Mexico Mining Association Convention, which this year took place August 24-26 at the Sandia Resort and Casino in Albuquerque.

Navajo Transitional Energy was recognized for reclaiming large portions of the Chinde Wash watershed near the company’s Navajo Mine in northwestern New Mexico. This mine, which has operated since 1963, is the sole fuel supplier for the adjacent 1,540-megawatt Four Corners Power Plant. The mine site covers 33,000 acre and is currently owned and operated by the first tribally owned coal mining company.

Chinde Wash flows east to west for approximately three miles through the Navajo Mine lease and into Chaco River. Z However, Chinde Wash sub-watershed comprises about 43 square miles (27,520 acres) of the San Juan Watershed.

Construction to accommodate mining altered the watershed’s ecosystem, including introducing invasive and non-native stands of tamarisk and Russian Olive trees in the wetlands and along the main channel that over time embedded themselves into the landscape.

In 2015, NTEC began mitigation efforts, planting scores of trees including, cottonwood, New Mexico olive trees, native Coyote willow stems, skunk bush sumac, and rubber rabbitbrush. In addition, approximately 52 acres were seeded with a riparian seed mix.

Despite some challenges, including the loss of water for several months due to a canal rupture and flooding caused by dams built by beavers that were new inhabitants in the area, NTEC persisted in its

mitigation efforts. Those efforts included working with the Navajo Nation Department of Fish and Wildlife to trap and relocate beavers, including one weighing 95 pounds that was placed in the San Juan River. Wood from trees the beavers had chopped down was cut into firewood and delivered to local Navajo families residing within the perimeter of Navajo Mine.

Today, the Chinde Wash is a thriving sustainable ecosystem supporting native riparian grasses, trees, and shrubs. This new ecosystem also supports a variety of wildlife, from the aforementioned beavers to badgers, coyotes, bobcats, and foxes and amphibians.

“In support of its overarching goal of returning this land to its original steward, the Navajo People, NTEC has excelled in using a balanced approach to reclaiming mined land with stunning results despite the challenges beyond their control,” EMNRD Deputy Secretary Todd Leahy said during the award ceremony. “We offer our sincere congratulations to Navajo Transitional Energy Company, and with pleasure we award NTEC the 2022 Excellence in Reclamation Award.”

MMD warns citizens to please be aware that abandoned mine features contain nothing of value, are extremely unstable, and pose serious danger, even death, to those who disturb them or enter hazardous openings. The best practice is to Stay Out and Stay Alive.

Information on award winners is posted on MMD’s website.

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Reclamation Work in the Chinde Wash has created a thriving sustainable ecosystem supporting native riparian grasses, trees, and shrubs, as well as a variety of wildlife, including beavers, coyotes, bobcats, and foxes and amphibians.