

PETITION 18-01



THE NEW MEXICO MINING COMMISSION

PETITION FOR REVIEW OF THE DIRECTOR'S ACTION, DATED DECEMBER 29, 2017, PERMIT REVISION 13-2 TO PERMIT NO. CI002RE

THE MULTICULTURAL ALLIANCE FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT and AMIGOS BRAVOS, PETITIONERS

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The Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment ("MASE") and Amigos Bravos ("Amigos") (collectively "Petitioners") hereby petition the New Mexico Mining Commission ("Commission") for review of the Mining and Minerals Division Director's ("Director") decision to grant Rio Grande Resources' ("RGR") application for a permit revision allowing the Mt. Taylor Mine ("Mine") to return to "active" or "operational" status without actually producing any minerals. A copy of that decision is attached as Exhibit A. MASE and Amigos submit this petition for review pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 69-36-15 and 19.10.14.1 NMAC *et. seq.*

**I. Introduction**

The Director's decision to approve a revision to the Mt. Taylor Mine permit allowing it to resume "operational" status even though it is not producing minerals presents a classic "zombie mine" scenario that is contrary to the Mining Act and its implementing regulations. The Director's Orwellian decision is contrary to law in three ways. First, the Mining Act does not authorize the Director to allow a mine to be inactive, i.e., not actually producing minerals, for more than 20 years. Second, the Mining Act clearly indicates which activities constitute active mining and which activities are standby and preparatory. Third, even if the Mining Act allows the Director some discretion to determine what constitutes "mining", the Director abused his discretion in this case. As a result, the Director's decision opens the door for idle mines to contaminate the environment and put public health at risk for indefinite periods of time. The

Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment and Amigos Bravos urge this Commission to reverse the Director's unlawful determination and direct RGR to immediately begin final reclamation and closure of the Mt. Taylor Mine.

## **II. Harm to Petitioners**

### **A. Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment.**

Petitioner Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment is a coalition of community organizations rooted in the experiences of uranium-impacted communities of the southwestern United States. The MASE coalition works to restore and protect the natural and cultural environment through respectfully promoting intercultural engagement among communities and institutions for the benefit of all life and future generations.

MASE's membership includes organizations whose members live, work, recreate and worship near the Mt. Taylor Mine. These members are likely to be adversely impacted by the Mine's return to operational status in several ways.

First, MASE members live in the same basin into which the Mine will discharge water and thus may be affected by increases in concentration of uranium and other toxic heavy metals in ground and surface water. This impact may not only affect the property rights of those MASE members who rely on private wells for domestic use, but also the health of members relying on water within the Rio San Jose basin for drinking water. Further, several of MASE's Indigenous members rely on water within the Rio San Jose Basin for ceremonial use, which will be negatively impacted by discharges to ground and surface water.

Second, the Mine's impacts upon return to active status may adversely affect MASE members who own property near the Mine and along transportation routes to and from the Mine. Construction and production at the Mine will cause noise, dust and emissions, both radioactive

and non-radioactive, that will likely interfere with MASE members' quiet enjoyment of their property. The addition of a heavy industrial mining project near their property will also likely decrease its value. Moreover, increased radioactive air emissions, particulate emissions and emissions from increased truck and heavy machinery traffic is likely to adversely impact the health of MASE members living, working or recreating near the Mine.

Third, MASE members are likely to be adversely impacted by the social and economic instability associated with extractive industries. The boom-and-bust nature of mining will likely impact communities near the Mine, such as those to which MASE members belong, by increasing social dislocations such as increased property and violent crime. Historically, economic dislocations also occur with extractive industries such as uranium mining. For example, when the inevitable commodity bust occurs, lost government revenue leads to cuts in public services such as police, fire, education, and health services,.

Fourth, MASE members who live near the Mine are likely to suffer the cumulative impacts associated with the Mine becoming operational. Because of the extent and severity of pollution from past uranium mining and processing, the United States Environmental Protection Agency is considering placing the San Mateo Creek sub-basin, which is within the Rio San Jose basin, on the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act ("CERCLA" or "Superfund") National Priorities List. The Mine's incremental adverse natural resource and health impacts will be added to the existing impacts, affecting those MASE members in the Rio San Jose basin who are downstream from the San Mateo Creek particularly.

Finally, several MASE members are Indigenous Peoples, including members of the Pueblo of Acoma, Pueblo of Laguna and the Navajo Nation. Members of these Indigenous communities place considerable cultural value on the entire Mt. Taylor landscape. Cultural

activities include gathering plants, conducting ceremonies and conducting pilgrimages. *See, Rayellen Res., Inc. v. N.M. Cultural Props. Review Comm.*, 2014-NMSC-006, ¶ 3. Indeed, Mt. Taylor has been designated a New Mexico Traditional Cultural Property and has been found to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. *Id.*; State Register of Cultural Properties, HDP #1939 (June 5, 2009); Benedict, Cynthia, *et. al.*, *Mt. Taylor Traditional Cultural Property Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places* at 36-38, U.S. Forest Service Report #2008-03-21 (Feb. 4, 2008). Further desecration on and near the Mt. Taylor Traditional Cultural Property presents a cultural and religious affront to Indigenous members of MASE. Preparation for mining activities will also interfere with cultural activities such as ceremonies and gathering culturally important plants.

B. Amigos Bravos.

Petitioner Amigos Bravos ("Amigos") is a statewide water conservation organization guided by social justice principles and dedicated to preserving and restoring the ecological and cultural integrity of New Mexico's water and the communities that depend on it. While rooted in science and the law, their work is inspired by the values and traditional knowledge of New Mexico's diverse Latino and Native American land-based populations, with whom they collaborate.

Amigos Bravos' programs and activities are developed through a collaborative process with its Board of Directors, Staff, and an Advisory Council of 40 constituents. This strategic planning process assures that Amigos Bravos remains close to its diverse constituency of land-based local communities, Native American tribes, and urban conservationists while linking those insights with expertise from a variety of professionals working on natural resources, legislative

policy, science, health, and education, as well as with representatives from regional and national conservation organizations.

Amigos Bravos is a membership organization with thousands of members statewide. Its members live in communities reflecting New Mexico's diversity. Like MASE, Amigos Bravos' members include individuals living near the Mt. Taylor Mine, including Indigenous peoples who have cultural ties to Mt. Taylor. Thus, for the same reasons that MASE members will be adversely affected by resumption of mining at the Mine, Amigos Bravos' members will be adversely affected.

Additionally, Amigos Bravos' members engage in recreational activities on and near Mt. Taylor, including hiking. Resumption of mining will adversely impact Amigos Bravos' members' aesthetic interests, for example, being able to hike without interference from traffic and mining noise, dust and lights.

Finally, because Amigos is a statewide organization, it has members who live near mines in other regions of New Mexico. Those Amigos members living near mines in other communities will be harmed by the precedent set by the Director's decision, i.e., allowing mines to be inactive and unreclaimed for indefinite time periods. Hence, if the Director's rationale in this case is applied to mines across New Mexico, Amigos members living in communities near copper mines in southwestern New Mexico, for example, would be faced with the prospect of enormous copper mines remaining inactive and unreclaimed for generations to come.

### **III. Facts and Procedure**

The Mt. Taylor Mine first began producing uranium, on a test basis, in 1979. Testimony of Joe Lister ("Lister Testimony") Transcript of December 4, 2015 Public Hearing on Revision 13-2 ("Tr.") at 17:11-15. Test production ceased in 1982. *Id.* at 17:16-18. Operations resumed

in 1985 and ceased again in 1990. *Id.* at 17:21-25 - 18:1-11. The Mt. Taylor Mine has not produced any uranium since 1990. Indeed, in 1991, the Mine's operator allowed the Mine to flood. *Id.* at 18:10-16.

The Mine received an existing mine permit under the New Mexico Mining Act in 1995. *Application for Revision of Mine Permit No. C1002RE, From Standby to Active Status and Modification of Groundwater Discharge Permit DP-6, Mt. Taylor Mine, San Mateo, New Mexico*, Rev. 1 (Nov. 2013) ("Application") at 1, § 1.1.1. The New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division ("Division") first approved the Mine's closure/closeout plan on December 18, 1998. *Id.* RGR received its first standby permit revision on October 12, 1999, which expired on October 7, 2004. *Id.* RGR received its second standby permit revision on July 27, 2005, which expired on July 5, 2010. *Id.* RGR received a third standby permit revision in 2012<sup>1</sup>, which expired in 2014. *Id.* RGR applied for its final standby permit revision on October 1, 2014, while its return to active status revision application was still under consideration by the Division. *See*, [http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/MMD/MARP/documents/2014-10-01StandbyRenewalApplication\\_MtTaylorMine.pdf](http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/MMD/MARP/documents/2014-10-01StandbyRenewalApplication_MtTaylorMine.pdf) (last viewed Feb. 23, 2018). However, RGR abandoned this standby application during the period when its return to active status permit revision was under consideration.

In April 2013, RGR applied for a permit revision allowing it to return to "active" status. *Application for Revision of Mine Permit No. C1002RE, From Standby to Active Status and Modification of Groundwater Discharge Permit DP-6, Mt. Taylor Mine, San Mateo, New Mexico* (April, 2013)("Revision 13-2"). This application was updated in November, 2013. *Application for Revision of Mine Permit No. C1002RE, From Standby to Active Status and Modification of*

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<sup>1</sup> Because of Petitioners' appeal of this standby revision, while the permit was granted in 2012, it was granted to be effective retroactively, with an effective date of July 5, 2010. *Application* at 1.

*Groundwater Discharge Permit DP-6, Mt. Taylor Mine, San Mateo, New Mexico*, Rev. 1 (Nov. 2013). The Division held a public hearing on Revision 13-2 on December 4, 2015, where Petitioners participated and presented technical and non-technical testimony. The Director granted RGR's permit revision application on December 29, 2017.

During this extended period of standby, RGR has continued to conduct some activities. Some of the planning, preparation and maintenance activities RGR has conducted on standby include: adding uranium reserves, applying for and receiving permits, testing water treatment facilities, building and maintaining mine infrastructure in preparation for a return to mining, and abating groundwater contamination. Lister Testimony, Tr. at 19:15-21; 55:11-25 - 56:1-14. These activities were intended to maintain the Mine and prepare the Mine for anticipated future production. *Id.*, Tr. at 54:15-16.

#### **IV. Statutory and Regulatory Framework**

The plain language and structure of the New Mexico Mining Act, NMSA 1978 §§ 69-36-1 *et seq.* ("Mining Act") and its implementing regulations clearly demonstrate that the New Mexico Legislature ("Legislature") intended that only mines which are actually exploring for or producing minerals should be considered "operational" or "active". The Mining Act and its implementing regulations also clearly demonstrate that mines that are not operational may only be inactive for a maximum period of twenty years. Therefore, under the Mining Act and its implementing regulations, and based on the face of RGR's permit revision application and testimony provided at hearing, RGR's permit revision application fails to satisfy the statutory and regulatory criteria for "active" status and RGR must therefore now meet its final reclamation obligations.

A. The New Mexico Mining Act.

The Legislature enacted the Mining Act to promote two equal objectives: the extraction of minerals and the reclamation of lands where minerals have been extracted. NMSA 1978, § 69-36-2.

The Mining Act's other provisions support this purpose. The Mining Act defines "mining" as:

The process of obtaining useful minerals from the earth's crust or from previously disposed or abandoned mining wastes, including exploration, open-cut mining and surface operation, the disposal of refuse from underground and in situ mining, mineral transportation, concentrating, milling, evaporation, leaching and other processing. 'Mining' does not mean ... smelting, refining, cleaning, preparation, transportation or other off-site operations not conducted on permit areas.

NMSA 1978, § 69-36-3(H).

The Mining Act provision dealing with standby status provides that the Commission must adopt regulations:

that require new and existing mining operation to obtain and maintain permits for standby status. A permit for standby status shall be issued for a maximum term of five years; provided that upon application the director may renew a permit for standby status for no more than three additional five-year terms. The regulation shall require that before a permit for standby status is issued or renewed an owner or operator shall:

1. identify the projected term of standby status for each unit of the new or existing mining operation;
2. take measures that reduce, to the extent practicable, the formation of acid and other toxic drainage to prevent releases that cause federal or state environmental standards to be exceeded;
3. meet applicable federal and state environmental standards and regulations during the period of standby status;
4. stabilize waste and storage units, leach piles, impoundments and pits during the term of standby status;
5. comply with applicable requirements of the New Mexico Mining Act and the regulations adopted pursuant to that act; and
6. provide an analysis of the economic viability of each unit proposed for standby status.

NMSA 1978, § 69-6-7(E)(1)-(6). While a standby period may be granted for a maximum of five years, the Division has the discretion to grant a standby permit revision for a shorter time period. *Id.*

B. Mining and Minerals Division Regulations.

Pursuant to its responsibilities under the Act, in 1996 the Commission promulgated regulations implementing the Mining Act. These regulations govern the Director's implementation of the Act.

The regulatory requirements for a standby permit largely reflect those in the Mining Act. In addition, however, the regulations define "standby status" as "the permitted temporary cessation of a mining operation which is expected to resume". 19.10.1.7.S.5 NMAC.

The primary regulation governing standby permit applications is 19.10.7.701 NMAC. The regulations governing standby indicate when the Mining Commission considers a mine inactive. That provision indicates that temporary activity cessations of 180 days or fewer do not require a standby permit. 19.10.7.701.A. NMAC. However, if a mine remains inactive, i.e. does not produce minerals for sale, for more than 180 days and does not conduct reclamation activities, it must apply for a standby permit. *Id.*

V. **Objections to the Director's Decision**

MASE's and Amigos' primary objection to the Director's decision is that neither the Mining Act nor its implementing regulations provide authority for the Director to grant a permit revision allowing a mine to be inactive for more than 20 years. Additionally, the Mining Act's definition of "mining" provides a list of activities that constitute active mining, indicating that the Legislature intended "operational" mines to be producing minerals. Therefore, Petitioners also object to the Director's decision on the ground that the Mine is not actually operational.

Alternatively, assuming for the sake of argument and without conceding that the Mining Act and regulations authorize the Director to determine that a mine is "operational" even though it is not producing minerals, in this case, the Director's decision was arbitrary, capricious, not supported by substantial evidence in the record and not in accordance with the law because RGR provided no factual basis upon which to conclude that the Mine is "operational".

In this case, RGR, failed to demonstrate that it would produce minerals when the Director granted its return to active status permit revision. RGR also provided no evidence that it would produce minerals in the foreseeable future. Instead, RGR simply called the revisions to its Closeout/Closure Plan a return to "operational" status. *Post-Hearing Submittal of Rio Grande Resources Corporation* at 1-2. Therefore, the Director had no factual basis to determine that the Mine is "operational", even if he had the discretion to do so. His decision is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion and contrary to law.

Because Petitioners object to the very basis of the Director's decision to grant revision 13-2, the validity of the Director's entire decision is at issue. However, to the extent that specific provisions of the Director's decision can be identified that bear on Petitioners' objection, Petitioners object to the following provisions:

1. Section 3, page 3, Findings of Fact. The Director's Findings of Fact contain no findings that RGR's proposed activities in returning to "operational" status would actually result in the production of minerals at the time the revision was approved. Moreover, there are no findings that support the conclusion that the Mine will produce minerals either now or in the foreseeable future;
2. Section 9.Q, pp.19-20, Return to Active Status. Section 9.Q incorporates Appendix C, which outlines the steps RGR intends to take to re-open and re-activate the Mine. By its terms, this Section acknowledges that during the eight years in which RGR claims the Mine will be "active",

RGR will actually be planning and preparing for mining, a process reserved for standby status. See, NMSA 1978, §69-36-3(H); 19.10.1.7.M.3 NMAC. This section provides no explanation why the Director considers planning and preparation activities to be "mining" as defined by the Mining Act, or why mines that are merely planning and preparing to produce minerals should be considered "operational." Further, Section 9.Q allows the Director unfettered discretion to extend the period of planning and preparation if RGR does not meet planning milestones or goals;

3. Section 10 (13-2), p.22, Conclusions of Law. Petitioners object to this section because the Director has not provided legal justification for his decision to classify a mine that is merely planning and preparing for mining as "operational". Further, the Director has provided no legal basis supporting his decision to allow a mine to remain inactive for more than the maximum 20-year period mandated by the Mining Act;

4. Appendix C; Planning and Preparing Schedule. RGR's planning and preparing schedule is provided in Appendix C, and incorporated into 9.Q. Petitioners object to Appendix A because the activities listed are planning and preparation activities that are limited to standby status. Indeed, RGR concedes in Appendix C that it will not be producing any minerals in the next eight years, but will only have completed "reactivation". Appendix C, p. 4.

A. The Mining Act Does Not Authorize the Director to Approve Revision 13-2 Unless the Mt. Taylor Mine is Producing Minerals.

The Mining Act contains two provisions that unequivocally indicate the Legislature's intent that an "operational" mine is a mine that is actually producing minerals. First, the Mining Act's definition of "mining" indicates that the Legislature intended that an operation engaged in mining would be conducting activities that are actively removing and processing minerals for sale. NMSA 1978, § 69-36-3(H). Absent actively exploring for, removing or processing minerals for sale an operation cannot be "mining" and thus cannot be "operational."

Second, the Mining Act contains a specific provision for mines that are not producing minerals: the standby provision. NMSA 1978, § 69-36-7(E). That provision allows a mine to temporarily cease mineral production. *Id.* Further, the standby provision indicates that a mine may not remain idle, i.e., on standby, for a period of more than 20 years total. *Id.* The Legislature's unequivocal language is meant to insure that mines do not remain inactive and thus unreclaimed indefinitely or in perpetuity. The Director's decision unlawfully modifies this statutory directive and must be overturned. *State ex rel. Taylor v. Johnson*, 1998-NMSC-015, ¶ 22 (an administrative agency's discretion may not justify altering, modifying or extending the reach of a law created by the Legislature).

1. *The Mining Act provides no authority for the Director's decision.*

There are no provisions in the Mining Act (or its regulations) authorizing the Director to revise a mining permit to impart "operational" status on a mine that is not producing minerals. Moreover, as demonstrated in detail in Sections A.2 and 3, below, the Mining Act's plain language and structure clearly indicate that the Legislature intended that only mines which are actively producing minerals should be designated operational, and that non-producing mines must revise their permits to standby status. The Director's decision, therefore, clearly exceeds the scope of his authority under the Mining Act because it grants "operational" status to a mine that is - and will be for the foreseeable future - clearly on "standby" status. This sort of unilateral action is an unequivocal usurpation of the Legislature's prerogative to set law and policy and is manifestly illegal. *State ex rel. Taylor v. Johnson*, 1998-NMSC-015, ¶ 22.

Perhaps the more troubling aspect of the Director's decision is that it appears to be a very specific accommodation of the permit applicant's business needs. RGR acknowledges that the actual purpose of its permit revision application is to revise its closeout/closure plan and financial assurance.

*Post-Hearing Submittal of Rio Grande Resources Corporation* at 1-2. Rather than simply apply to the Division for a permit revision to update its closure/closeout plan and financial assurance, RGR instead framed its permit amendment as a return to operational status. *Id.*

The most obvious reason for RGR's gambit is that it realizes that under the most ideal (and most unrealistic) circumstances, it will not be able to produce minerals from the Mine for eight years, beyond the five year period legally allowed by its final standby period. *See*, Attachment A, Appendix C; *see also*, 1978 NMSA, § 69-36-7(E). More probably, however, the Mine will not produce minerals for decades, if ever. Testimony of Paul Robinson ("Robinson Testimony"), Tr. at 136:22-25 - 137:1. Manipulating the Mining Act and regulations to keep a failing mine on life support is a decision that not only violates the Mining Act, but also represents a policy that should raise grave concern for both the public and this Commission.

2. *"Mining" is limited to producing minerals.*

Not only does the Mining Act provide no authority for the Director to unilaterally fashion an entirely new category of mine activity, i.e., "zombie mines", but the Mining Act's plain language affirmatively restricts "operational" mines to those that are producing minerals. NMSA 1978, § 69-36-3(H); *State v. Strauch*, 2015-NMSC-009, ¶¶ 13, 14 (objective of statutory interpretation is to further the Legislature's intent; legislative intent is demonstrated through a statute's plain language, context and legislative purpose). The Director's decision directly contradicts the Mining Act's plain language in this regard.

Section 69-36-3(H) provides a list of activities that the Legislature considered to be "mining". *Id.* Every listed activity in the definition of "mining" has the character of being an activity that produces minerals, rather than an activity that merely sets the stage for perhaps eventually producing minerals. *Id.*; *Fancher v. Bd. of Comm'rs*, 1921-NMSC-039, ¶ 11 (where statutory authority to do

something is granted, but the mode of doing it is prescribed, it is limited to be done in that mode; all other modes are excluded).

With the possible exception of a brief exploration project, none of the activities described in RGR's return to "operational" status will produce minerals. Indeed, many of the activities are purely planning activities such as procuring equipment and submitting plans to regulators. *See*, Appendix C to Director's Decision. The Director's decision to designate the Mine as "operational", therefore contradicts the Mining Act's plain language.

3. *Mines that are not producing minerals must be on standby.*

When a mine is temporarily not producing minerals because of market conditions, supply chain disruptions, labor disputes or any other reason, the Mining Act allows mine operators to revise their permits to allow the mine to become inactive for a period of up to five years. NMSA 1978, § 69-36-7(E). These standby periods are renewable up to three times, for an entire period of inactivity not to exceed 20 years. *Id.* The standby provisions were enacted to accommodate temporary production disruptions, but still insure that mines would not be allowed to delay final reclamation activities indefinitely or perpetually. *State v. Strauch*, 2015-NMSC-009, ¶¶ 13, 14.

The Director's decision in this case renders the entire category of standby meaningless. If, as in this case, the Director can by fiat proclaim that a mine is "operational" even though it is not producing minerals and will not produce minerals until an indeterminate time in the future, if ever, there is no reason for any mine to rely on the Mining Act's standby provision. *State v. Juan*, 2010-NMSC-041, ¶ 39 (statute must be construed such that no part is rendered superfluous).

The Director's decision also renders the Legislature's 20-year cap on inactivity meaningless. If mere planning, procurement, and maintenance activities render a mine "operational", a mine could in theory plan and prepare for decades and be considered "active". During this period, final reclamation

activities could be deferred indefinitely, considerably increasing the risk of environmental contamination and adverse public health impacts. Indeed, that is the case here, where the Mt. Taylor Mine has contaminated groundwater at the mine site. *See, e.g.*, Application, § 2.3 at 10. Moreover, there are thousands of unreclaimed mines across New Mexico that continue to contaminate water, air and soil. *See*, <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/MMD/AML/amlmain.html> (last viewed Feb. 22, 2018).

In this case, the Mine has not produced uranium since 1990, a total of 28 years. Lister Testimony, Tr. at 17:21-25 - 18:1-11. The Mine was first permitted under the Mining Act in December of 1998. Application at 1, § 1.1.1. Thus, during the time it has been subject to the Mining Act, the Mine has been inactive for nearly 20 years. Therefore, under the most lenient interpretation of the Mining Act, the Mine will either have to produce minerals or begin final reclamation activities by December 2018, in order to give the Legislature's 20 year limit on inactivity any meaning. *State v. Juan*, 2010-NMSC-041, ¶ 39.

B. The Mining Act Regulations Do Not Authorize the Director to Approve Revision 13-2 Unless the Mt. Taylor Mine is Currently Producing Minerals.

Petitioners object to the Director's decision on the grounds that the Mining Act's implementing regulations do not authorize the Director to designate a mine that is not producing minerals as "operational". Like the Mining Act, the Commission's regulations contemplate that mines are either producing minerals or on standby, that is, inactive or conducting activities in preparation for producing minerals.

The Commission's definition of "mining" is identical to that of the Mining Act. 19.10.1.7.M.3 NMAC. Thus, the Commission adopted the Legislature's intent that mining is limited to mines that are actively producing minerals.

The regulations governing standby status support this distinction. Section 701 of the Commission's regulations provides for two categories of mine inactivity. The first is periods of

inactivity of 180 days or fewer. 19.10.7.701.A NMAC. Mines falling into this category may cease operations, including reclamation activities, for 180 days or fewer, without having to revise their permit. *Id.* The second category of inactivity is inactivity lasting more than 180 days where no reclamation occurs. *Id.* Mines that fall into this category must revise their permits to reflect their standby status. *Id.* Standby status cannot last for more than a total of 20 years. 19.10.7.701.I. Section 701 eliminates any discretion to permit any activity that is not in the aforementioned categories.

In this case, the Director's decision violates the Commission's regulations. Here, the Director decided that so long as RGR is planning or preparing for future mining, the Mine is "operational". Director's Decision, Attachment A at § 9.Q. This is clearly beyond the Director's discretion.

C. The Director's Decision Will Lead to Indefinite Periods of Unreclaimed Mine Pollution.

The Director's decision to improperly allow the Mine to revise its permit to "active" status also has significant policy implications. Allowing the Director's decision to stand effectively allows the Director unfettered discretion to issue operational permit revisions to inactive mines, that may be incapable of actually producing minerals. Thus, an inactive mine like the Mt. Taylor Mine could be insulated from conducting reclamation activities indefinitely. This is an absurd result the Legislature did not contemplate, particularly in light of the Mining Act's express purpose of promoting responsible mine reclamation. NMSA 1978, § 69-36-2; *State v. Javier M.*, 2001-NMSC-030, ¶ 46 (courts will not interpret a statute in a manner that leads to an absurd result).

In this case, the Mt. Taylor Mine has been idle for 28 years. The Director's decision allows RGR to call its mine "operational" for a minimum of eight years<sup>2</sup> without producing any minerals. If

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<sup>2</sup> The actual period of "operational" inactivity could be much longer. Permit section 9.Q gives the Director unlimited discretion to extend milestones and allow delays. A more reasonable

RGR fails to produce uranium after eight or more years, it has the option of using its final standby permit revision, allowing it to remain inactive for up to an additional five years. If RGR cannot produce uranium after its final standby period expires, it could once again attempt to return to "active" status by asserting that the uranium market may become more favorable at some point in the future, for which it would be preparing, and which would result in another indefinite period of "operational" inactivity where no minerals are actually being produced. All the while, the Mt. Taylor Mine would remain unreclaimed, leaching contaminants into the groundwater, air and soil.

This is precisely the scenario that the National Academy of Sciences sought to avoid when it advised federal agencies:

Some companies have used 'temporary' [standby] status to delay or avoid taking appropriate final actions to clean up and otherwise close their facilities. [Federal] [a]gencies should have a clearly stated process and criteria to be used in responding to temporary closures.

*Hardrock Mining on Federal Lands* at 102 (1999). Fortunately, as described above, the New Mexico Legislature addressed this very problem by placing a 20-year cap on inactivity and by providing clear definitions, processes, and criteria for temporary closures. The Director's decision to revise RGR's permit to "operational" status without the requisite mineral production is unlawful and ignores the Legislature's fundamental policy decision that strikes a balance between the regulation of mining activity and the protection of New Mexico's public health and natural resources through timely reclamation. The Director's decision should be reversed.

D. The Director Had No Basis for Determining that the Mt. Taylor Mine is "Operational".

Assuming, without conceding, that the Director has the discretion to designate a mine that is not producing minerals and will not produce minerals within a reasonable period of time

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permit condition would have required RGR to meet certain milestones and if it did not, RGR would be required to begin final reclamation activities immediately.

as "operational", Petitioners object to the Director's decision in this case because the Director had no reasonable basis for his decision. The Director's decision is therefore arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion and contrary to law.

The sole basis for RGR's assertion that the mine will be actually operational in eight years is its unfounded belief and speculation that the price of uranium will be sufficient to sustain profitable operations. However, RGR failed to demonstrate that the Mt. Taylor Mine will be economically viable in the foreseeable future. Indeed, every credible source indicated that uranium prices will remain depressed for years to come.

1. RGR Presented No Credible Data to Support its Assertion that the Mt. Taylor Mine will be Operational in Eight Years.

In its permit revision application, RGR asserted that the uranium market would support uranium production at the Mt. Taylor Mine by the time the Mine was ready to resume production. Application, § 1.3 at 5. In the December, 2015 public hearing on RGR's permit revision, RGR witnesses Mr. Joe Lister and Dr. Alan Kuhn expanded on this assertion. There, RGR's witnesses relied on confidential industry data that were not shared with the public or with Petitioners. Lister Testimony, Tr. at 61:3-7. Additionally, both witnesses assumed that discontinuation of certain Federal programs would likewise cause uranium prices to rise. Tr. at 58:16-24. These unsupported assertions are insufficient to provide a basis for the Director's decision.

More important, RGR has consistently made such unsupported and speculative assertions in the service of applying for permit revisions, and those assertions have consistently proven wrong. For example, in its June 16, 2010 standby application that it submitted to MMD, RGR asserted, without support, that:

RGR has the largest uranium deposit in the United States, which is well over 100,000,000 pounds of U<sub>3</sub>O<sub>8</sub> in the Mt. Taylor Mine ore body. The market price now does not permit a viable mining operation, primarily because of the availability of uranium from weapons decommissioning in the world and U.S. markets. However, such material will be used up after a period of time, after which the market demand for new uranium oxide should increase. Additionally, in the future the demand for clean [sic] nuclear power generating plants will increase as low-cost coal reserves are depleted and demand for electric power increases. These conditions and the high grade ore reserves at Mt. Taylor will increase the value of the Mt. Taylor Mine and lead to the resumption of operations in the relatively near future.

Rio Grande Resources Corporation, Renewal Application for Standby Status § 1.6 at 3. As of 2018, the market does not support mining resumption.

In the August 17, 2011 public hearing on the same standby permit revision application, RGR's witness, Mr. Doug Irving, asserted, without support or analysis, that worldwide demand for uranium was increasing, that uranium prices are increasing, and uranium stockpiles from decommissioned weapons are decreasing. Irving Testimony, Tr. at 51:20 – 53:30.

Going back further, in its 1994 application for its existing mine permit, RGR asserted that mineral production was expected to resume no later than 2010. *Permit Application, Mt. Taylor Mine, Rio Grande Resources Corporation*, § 9.1 at PA-12 (December 20, 1994). An excerpt of that application is attached as Exhibit B. Twenty-four years after RGR made that prediction, the uranium market is no nearer to supporting production at the Mine.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the spot price of uranium has actually fallen considerably since RGR's witnesses gave their testimony in 2015. At that time, uranium's spot price was \$36/lb. Tr. at 59:8. As of February 19, 2018, the spot price for uranium was \$21.75/lb. <https://www.uxc.com/p/prices/UxCPrices.aspx> (last viewed Feb. 23, 2018).

2. RGR Failed to Present any Economic Analysis.

Notwithstanding the unreliability of RGR's witnesses and consistent inaccuracy of its market predictions, RGR provided no substantive demonstration that the Mt. Taylor Mine will be economically viable in the foreseeable future. Among the issues that RGR failed to explore were: the global demand for uranium, domestic or global energy demand and the role of nuclear power (and thus uranium) in that demand, how demand for nuclear power will be influenced by falling renewable and natural gas prices, and lack of capacity to mill uranium that the Mine might produce. As RGR conceded, all these considerations are important to determining whether or not the Mine will actually produce any minerals. Lister Testimony, Tr. at 61:3-5 (uranium market "absolutely" important to decision to become operational); 72:1-8 (mill necessary for processing uranium ore). Without analysis of these important factors, the Director's decision is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion and contrary to law.

3. Petitioners' Economic Analysis Demonstrates the Uranium Market is Unlikely to Support Production at the Mine in the Foreseeable Future.

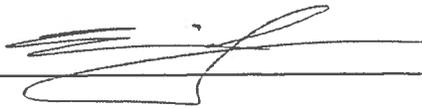
In stark contrast to RGR's complete lack of economic or market analysis, at the December, 2015 public hearing, Petitioners presented extensive and verifiable testimony about uranium market conditions in the foreseeable future. Robinson Testimony, Tr. at 123-144. In his testimony, Mr. Robinson noted that the proposed Roca Honda Mine, which would be located within a mile of the Mt. Taylor Mine, and which represents a reasonable analog to the Mt. Taylor Mine, could produce uranium profitably at \$65/lb. Robinson Testimony, Tr. at 129:11-13. This is likely approximately the price at which the Mt. Taylor Mine could profitably produce uranium. *Id.*, Tr. at 132:5-12. However, Mr. Robinson testified that current uranium production capacity would be sufficient to meet demand through at least 2024 and likely until 2035. *Id.*, Tr. at 136:18-25 - 137:1. Thus, it is unlikely that the uranium market will support a price that allows

profitable uranium production at the Mt. Taylor Mine until 2035, and likely longer. In light of that evidence, the Director's decision to deem the Mine "operational" is unreasonable.

**VI. Conclusion**

For all the foregoing reasons, Petitioners respectfully request that the Commission reverse the Director's decision granting Revision 13-2 and require RGR to submit an application for standby status. Alternatively, the Commission should direct RGR to begin final reclamation activities.

Respectfully submitted this 28<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2018.



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Attorneys for Petitioners

## CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this 28<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2018, I have delivered a copy of the foregoing pleading in the above-captioned case via U.S. mail, first class, to the following:

Mr. Fernando Martinez  
Director  
Mining and Minerals Division  
New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department  
1220 South St. Francis Dr.  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

Gabriel Wade, Esq.  
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500 Fourth Street, NW  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102

By:



**PERMIT REVISION 13-2 TO PERMIT NO. CI002RE  
MT. TAYLOR MINE  
EXISTING MINING OPERATION**

**MINING AND MINERALS DIVISION  
ENERGY, MINERALS AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT**

Permit Revision 13-2 ("Revision 13-2" or "Revision") to Permit No. CI002RE is issued by the Director of the Mining and Minerals Division ("MMD") of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department ("EMNRD") to:

Rio Grande Resources Corporation ("RGR");  
whose correct address is: P.O. Box 1150  
Grants, NM 87020

("Permittee") for the Mount Taylor Mine ("Mine") located in Cibola County, New Mexico.

This Permit Revision 13-2 approves RGR's April 5, 2013 application to transition from standby status to operating (herein termed active) status, and incorporates the updated Closeout Plan for the Mine, Permit No. CI002RE (November 2013). This Revision also approves the joint financial assurance ("FA") held by EMNRD and the New Mexico Environment Department ("NMED") for the updated Closeout Plan in the amount of \$7,606,477.00 in the form of an Irrevocable Standby Letter of Credit No. MB60516318, as amended, issued by Bank of the West. The following sections of Permit No. CI002RE are added or revised to read as follows:

**Section 1 (Revision 13-2). STATUTES AND REGULATIONS**

This Permit is issued pursuant to the New Mexico Mining Act, NMSA 1978, §69-36-1, *et seq.* (Repl. Pamp. 1993) ("Act") and is subject to: all applicable requirements of the Act and New Mexico Mining Act Rules Title 19, Chapter 10, Parts 1 through 14 NMAC ("Rules"), and any other regulations, which are now, or hereafter in force under the Act; and all such requirements and regulations are made a part of this Permit by this reference.

**Section 1A (Revision 13-2). PERMIT REVISION PACKAGE**

A. The Permit Revision Package ("PRP") is comprised of the following documents:

1. April 2013, *Application for Revision 13-2, Standby to Active Status*, consisting of:

- a. *Application*
  - i. *Text, Tables and Figures*
  - ii. *Appendix A - Drawings*
  - iii. *Appendix B - Calculations*
  - iv. *Appendix C - Other Permits*
  - v. *Appendix D - Ion Exchange Plant Design*

b. *Closeout/Closure Plan (CCP)*

Exhibit A

- i. *CCP Text, Tables and Figures*
  - ii. *CCP Appendix A - Drawings*
  - iii. *CCP Appendix B - Engineering Analysis*
  - iv. *CCP Appendix C - Technical Specifications*
  - v. *CCP Appendix D - Soil Investigation, Radiological Investigation, Lab Test Results*
  - vi. *Original Closeout Plan Soil Data*
2. April 2013, *Public Notice, Revision 13-2*
  3. November 2013, *Revised Application for Revision 13-2, Standby to Active Status*
  4. November 2013, *Revised Closeout/Closure Plan, Revision 13-2*
  5. April 2014, *Errata and Addenda for Revision 13-2*
  6. July 2015, *Revision 2 Addendum to Application for Revision 13-2, (Molybdenum-Selenium treatment)*
  7. July 2015, *Revision 2 Addendum to Closeout/Closure Plan for Revision 13-2 (Mo-Se treatment)*
  8. April 2017, *Mt. Taylor Mine Reactivation Plan – Phases, Tasks, and Sequence; Draft Rev. A*
  9. May 2017, *Mt. Taylor Mine Closeout/Closure Plan, Rev. 1 – Clarification of Plans for Ore Pad Removal*
  10. June 2017, *Mt. Taylor Mine Reactivation Plan – Phases, Tasks, and Sequence; Revision B - Supplements to Draft Rev. A*

**Section 2 (Revision 13-2).**

**PERMIT AREA AND DESIGN LIMITS**

- A. The permit area is comprised of: Section 5 in T12N-R7W N.M.P.M.; S 1/2 Section 18, Section 19, W 1/2 Section 29, Section 30, N 1/2 and SE 1/4 Section 31, NW1/4 and S 1/2 Section 32 in T13N-R7W N.M.P.M.; E 1/2 Section 24, NE 1/4 Section 25 in T13N-R8W, N.M.P.M.; the pipeline corridor from the N ¼ corner Section 24 to the point of discharge in T14N-R8W (total length 20,200 feet, width 4 feet); and the access road from NE/NW/NW Section 24 to center of Section 24 of T13N-R8W (total length 4,100 feet, width 50 feet), in Cibola County, New Mexico - and pictured in Figure 1-3, *Mine Permit Area* of the permit application.
- B. The approved design limits for individual units are identified in Figure 1-2 of the PRP, in the Mount Taylor Mine Closeout/Closure Plan (“CCP”) dated July 2012, as revised (Revision 1), dated November 2013. The existing units include:
  1. Service and Support Area including the Mine Shafts, Manway and Production.
  2. South Waste Rock Pile.
  3. Mine Water Treatment Unit Area.
  4. Ore Stockpile Area.
  5. Borrow Area.
  6. South Storm Water Pond.
  7. North Storm Water Pond.
  8. County Road 334 Area.

**Section 3 (Revision 13-2).**

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

- A. The PRP and updated CCP are complete and contain all the information required, with the conditions outlined in this revision document, as required by §19.10.5.503.F.1, §19.10.5.506.B.1-4 NMAC, §19.10.5.506.J.1-6 NMAC.
- B. The Permittee has paid the permit revision application fee of \$5,000.00 as required by §19.10.2.201.J NMAC.
- C. The Permittee has provided written information stating the name and official business address of the applicant and its agent for service of process, as required by §19.10.5.503.F.2 NMAC.
- D. The Permittee has provided the required signature and certification, as required by §19.10.5.503.F.3 NMAC.
- E. The Permittee is in compliance with §19.10.2 NMAC regarding fees.
- F. The Permittee agrees to meet applicable federal and state environmental standards and regulations while on active status. On July 29, 2016 the Secretary of the Environment Department provided a written determination that indicated environmental standards of the Department are expected to achieve compliance if carried out as described in the closeout plan as required by §19.10.5.506.J.5 NMAC.
- G. The Permittee agrees to comply with the applicable requirements of the Act, the Rules and the Permit during active status, as required by §19.10.5.503.F.6 and §19.10.5.506.J.6 NMAC.
- H. Public notice for the application for revision of the Permit to transition from standby to active status was provided as required by §19.10.9 and §19.10.5.503.F.5 NMAC. Public notice for the updated Closeout Plan was provided as required by §19.10.9 and §19.10.5.506.J.1 NMAC.
- I. Public notice of the public hearing was published by MMD on October 21, 2015 for the public hearing held on December 4, 2015, as required by §19.10.9.904.B NMAC.
- J. The Permittee has provided satisfactory financial assurance to complete the Closeout Plan in the amount of **\$7,606,477.00** (updated for inflation to 2016); as required by §19.10.5.506.J.2 NMAC. The financial assurance instrument is in the form of Irrevocable Standby Letter of Credit No. MB60516318, as amended (3/31/2017), issued by the Bank of the West, Global Trade Services, 13300 Crossroad Parkway North, City of Industry, CA 91746, and is in a form acceptable to the Director.
- K. The approved Post-Mining Land Uses ("PMLU") for the Permit area are grazing and

commercial. The commercial PMLU areas are identified in the PRP, Mt. Taylor Mine CCP Revision 2 (July 2015), in Drawing MT13-CL-04, *Revision 2, Facility Disposition Plan*, as "*Facilities to Remain*" and indicated as "*Wells to Remain*" (see footnote to Table 5.1 in Revision 13-2, Appendix B). The CCP, subject to conditions in this permit revision, demonstrates that the work to be done will reclaim disturbed areas within the Permit area to a condition that allows for the re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem on the Permit area following closure, appropriate for the life zone of the surrounding areas, unless conflicting in the areas designated as grazing and commercial PMLU pursuant to §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

**Section 5 (Revision 13-2). AGENCY RIGHT OF ENTRY**

The Permittee shall allow the authorized representatives of the Director to enter as provided for in §19.10.5.503.F.6, §19.10.11.1101, and §19.10.12.1210 NMAC.

**Section 6 (Revision 13-2). PERMIT COVERAGE**

This Permit shall be binding on any person or persons conducting mining and reclamation operations under this Permit.

**Section 8 (Revision 13-2). COMPLIANCE WITH THE PERMIT AND OTHER PERMITS**

The Permittee shall conduct mining and reclamation operations only as described in the approved PRP, the Permit, and any revisions or modifications approved by the Director. The Permittee shall comply with any and all conditions that are incorporated into the PRP. Future submittals required by this Permit shall be presented in both electronic and written form to the Director for approval.

The Permittee will comply with the requirements of NMED discharge permit ("DP") 61 and meet applicable environmental standards as required by the Secretary of the Environment Department pursuant to §19.10.5.506.J.5 NMAC.

**Section 9 (Revision 13-2). GENERAL OBLIGATIONS AND CONDITIONS**

This Permit is subject to the following conditions:

- A. The Permittee may be subject to enforcement action according to §19.10.11 NMAC for failing to conduct reclamation and closeout operations as described in the Closeout Plan or for failing to submit any of the following:
  - 1) annual reports as required by §19.10.5.510 NMAC;
  - 2) annual fees as required by §19.10.2.202 NMAC.
- B. The Permittee shall include in the annual reports, information required by §19.10.5.510 NMAC. In addition, the following information shall be included:
  - 1) the status of closure activities for each unit;

- 2) any maintenance and repair work conducted for any closure component;
- 3) the date the work was done;
- 4) vegetative monitoring data as described in Appendix A of this Revision 13-2;
- 5) vegetative monitoring data collected on revegetated areas; and
- 6) meteorological data, if applicable.

C. The Permittee shall notify MMD 30 days prior to performing any permanent closeout/reclamation activities at the mine site.

**D. MINE WATER TREATMENT UNIT AREA**

The following conditions apply to the Mine Water Treatment Unit Area ("MWTU") and Ore Pad Runoff Retention Pond, as identified on Drawing MT13-AC-02, *Revision 2, Mine Reactivation Plan Mine Water Treatment (MWTU) Upgrades*. These conditions are required to mitigate the disturbances and provide for stabilization within the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.(1) NMAC.

The conditions are also required to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

**1. Building Demolition and Removal**

All MWTU facilities (illustrated on Drawing MT13-CL-04, *Revision 2, Facility Disposition Plan*, and listed in Appendix B of this Revision), shall be demolished, removed or buried. Demolition, removal and/or burial shall be accomplished by meeting the following conditions, which may be modified with MMD approval following final demolition and burial design.

- a) Where footings, slabs, walls, pavement, manholes, vaults, stormwater controls, and other foundations are not demolished, they shall be covered with cover material to a minimum thickness of 24 inches, or greater thickness if needed to achieve the revegetation and erosion resistance standards.
- b) Covered footings, slabs, walls, pavement, manholes, vaults, stormwater controls and other foundations shall be revegetated in accordance with Appendix A.

**2. Pond Reclamation**

At mine closeout the MWTU pond sediments shall be removed and placed within a lined disposal cell located within the South Waste Rock Pile Area ("SWRP") as shown on Drawing MT13-CL-13, *2013 Rev.1 Appendix A, Final Site Grading Plan*, and on Drawing MT13-CL-10, *2013 Rev.1, Appendix A, Final Grading and Cover Sections, SWRP Area*. The following conditions may be modified following final pond reclamation design, with MMD approval.

- a) During pond sediment excavation, the site will be monitored for radiation in

accordance with the reclamation and post-reclamation radiation monitoring plan required in Section L.

- b) Pond sediments shall be removed and placed in the lined disposal cell in the South Waste Rock Pile until the remaining pond surface has radiation levels that meet the requirements of Section L.
- c) Remaining pond liners will be consolidated; demolished hydraulic controls and associated demolished concrete may be placed in the ponds before the pond berms are pushed into the ponds.
- d) If necessary the ponds and other areas of the MWTU will be covered with sufficient cover material to achieve the performance standard for mine site radiation levels as described in Section L. The cover material may be derived from the berms surrounding the ponds or additional cover material may be required to be placed, in order to achieve the reclamation performance standard in Section L.

### **3. Surface Shaping and Stormwater Management**

- a) The Permittee shall regrade the MWTU in a manner that promotes positive drainage and eliminates, to the extent practicable, ponding on the final surfaces. The Permittee shall construct the surfaces to a final grade to direct stormwater to water management conveyances as shown on Drawing MT13-CL-13, *Appendix A, Final Site Grading Plan* in the CCP. RGR shall provide other erosion controls if required by the MMD. All final slopes shall be regraded to no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.
- b) Designed channels for drainage control and sediment containment will be established on the reclaimed areas. The designed channels will be constructed to minimize the gradient and reduce flow velocities. These water diversion structures will be designed for a 100-year, 24-hour storm event or an alternative criterion approved by the MMD in consultation with other state or federal agencies.

### **4. Cover Placement Plan**

- a) Suitable cover material for the MWTU shall be placed or remain in place at a minimum thickness of 24 inches, or greater cover thickness if needed to achieve the performance standard for mine site radiation levels as described in Section L, achieve revegetation and erosion resistance, and to demonstrate that the cover material is protective of ground water as required by NMED. Test plot studies required in Section 9.M.3 shall be designed to demonstrate that the 24-inch thick cover will meet these requirements.
- b) All areas used for cover material sources shall be graded for stormwater control, ripped to a minimum depth of 12 inches, and revegetated per the requirements of Appendix A. All slopes and high walls created by excavation of cover materials shall be no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.

**5. Revegetation Plan**

The MWTU shall be revegetated in accordance with revegetation standards set forth in Appendix A.

**6. Post-Mining Land Use**

The approved PMLU for the MWTU shall be grazing, in compliance with §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

**E. SOUTH WASTE ROCK PILE AREA**

The following conditions apply to the South Waste Rock Pile Area ("SWRP"), as identified on Drawing MT13-CL-02, *Revision 1, Appendix A, Closeout Plan Index Sheet* in the CCP. These conditions are required to mitigate the disturbances within the Permit area and provide for stabilization of the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.(1) NMAC. The conditions are also required to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A NMAC. Specifications contained in these conditions may be modified during final design, with MMD approval.

**1. Pond Sediments Disposal Cell**

A clay-lined disposal cell for MWTU pond sediments shall be constructed within the SWRP as shown on Drawings MT13-CL-02, *Appendix A, Closeout Plan Index Sheet*, on MT13-CL-09, *Appendix A, Final Grading and Cover Plan-Waste Rock Pile Area*, and MT13-CL-10, *Appendix A, Final Grading and Cover Sections – SWRP Area*, respectively. The following conditions may be modified following pond sediment disposal cell design, with MMD approval.

a) The Permittee shall submit for MMD approval, construction plans and specifications (per disposal cell and cover designs in the CCP) for the lined disposal cell at least 45 days prior to construction commencement. Construction plans shall include design of the liner and disposal cell cover construction including hydraulic conductivity and other testing results of the liner and cover material, for MMD approval. The Permittee shall submit a Construction Quality Assurance Report ("CQAR") of the disposal cell to MMD within 180 days after completion of the disposal cell.

**2. Surface Shaping and Stormwater Management**

a) The Permittee shall regrade the SWRP in a manner that ensures positive drainage and eliminates, to the extent practicable, ponding on the top surfaces and final cover surfaces. The Permittee shall construct the surfaces to a final grade to direct stormwater to water management conveyances as shown on Drawing MT13-CL-13, *Appendix A, Final Site Grading Plan* in the CCP. RGR shall provide other

erosion controls if required by the MMD. All final slopes shall be regraded to no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.

- b) Designed channels for drainage control and sediment containment will be established on the reclaimed areas. The designed channels will be constructed to minimize the gradient and reduce flow velocities. These water diversion structures will be designed for a 100-year, 24-hour storm event or an alternative criterion approved by the MMD in consultation with other state or federal agencies.

### 3. Cover Placement Plan

- a) The SWRP shall be covered with a minimum of 24 inches, or greater thickness if needed, of suitable cover material to achieve the performance standard for mine site radiation levels as described in Section L, revegetation and erosion resistance, and to demonstrate that the cover material is protective of ground water as required by NMED. Test plot studies required in Condition 9.M.3 shall be designed to demonstrate that the 24-inch thick cover will meet these requirements.
- b) All areas used for cover borrow material sources shall be graded for stormwater control, ripped and/or covered with an overall minimum thickness of 12 inches, and revegetated according to requirements of Appendix A. All slopes and high walls created by excavation of borrow pits shall be no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.

### 4. Revegetation Plan

The SWRP shall be revegetated in accordance with revegetation standards set forth in Appendix A.

### 5. Post-Mining Land Use

The PMLU for the SWRP shall be grazing, in compliance with §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

## F. **BORROW AREAS**

The following conditions apply to the Borrow Area (located immediately east of the "Ore Pad Area"), as identified on Drawing MT13-CL-02, *Appendix A, Closeout Plan Index Sheet* in the CCP. These conditions are required to mitigate the disturbances and provide for stabilization within the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.(1) NMAC. The conditions are also required to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

### 1. Surface Shaping and Stormwater Management

- a) The Permittee shall regrade the Borrow Area and other areas used for borrow material sources in a manner that promotes positive drainage and eliminates, to the extent practicable, ponding on the final cover surfaces. The Permittee shall

construct the surfaces to a final grade to direct stormwater to water management conveyances as shown on Drawing MT13-CL-13, *Appendix A, Final Site Grading Plan* in the CCP. RGR shall provide other erosion controls if required by the MMD. All final slopes shall be regraded to no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.

- b) Designed channels for drainage control and sediment containment will be established on the reclaimed areas. The designed channels will be constructed to minimize the gradient and reduce flow velocities. These water diversion structures will be designed for a 100-year, 24-hour storm event or an alternative criterion approved by the MMD in consultation with other state or federal agencies.

## 2. Revegetation Plan

- a) Suitable material at the Borrow Area shall be ripped to a minimum depth of 12 inches. The final surface will achieve the performance standard for mine site radiation levels as described in Section L, and demonstrate erosion resistance.
- b) The Borrow Area shall be revegetated in accordance with revegetation standards set forth in Appendix A.

## 3. Post-Mining Land Use

The PMLU for the Borrow Area shall be grazing in compliance with §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

## G. ORE PAD AREA

The following conditions apply to the existing Ore Pad Area ("OPA"), as identified on Drawing MT13-CL-02, *Revision 1, Appendix A, Closeout Plan Index Sheet*, and Drawing MT13-CL-04, *Revision 2, Facility Disposition Plan* in the CCP. These conditions are required to mitigate disturbances within the Permit area and provide for stabilization of the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.(1) NMAC. The conditions are also required to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A NMAC. Specifications contained in these conditions may be modified during final design, with MMD approval.

### 1. Ore and Infrastructure Removal

The ore stockpile presently covers 6.8 acres and contains approximately 60,000 tons of low-grade ore. The entire surface of the pile is covered with approximately two feet of native soil that is supporting established volunteer vegetation, consisting mostly of grasses.

- a) Upon resumption of mine operations, and prior to placement of newly-mined ore from the mine on the OPA, the existing stockpile of ore will be removed from the OPA. Current stockpile cover soil that exceeds the *Joint Guidance for the Cleanup*

*and Reclamation of Existing Uranium Mining Operations in New Mexico*, dated March 2016 (“Joint Guidance”) cleanup standard will be placed in the lined reactivation disposal cell located within the South Waste Rock Pile. Stockpile cover soil that meets the Joint Guidance cleanup standard may be utilized as fill or cover where needed on the mine site, upon MMD approval. Any remaining contaminated material will be excavated and placed in the lined reactivation disposal cell in the SWRP.

- b) Following removal and relocation of the OPA cover soil, the existing stockpile of ore will be shipped off site to be used as feed stock in uranium milling (per April 2013 *Application for Revision 13-2, Standby to Active Status: Application, Section 2.6 - Ore Stockpile*, p. 11).
- c) After stockpiled ore and contaminated materials are removed, the existing OPA working surface will be excavated and removed to the lined reactivation disposal cell in the SWRP. A new OPA will be reconstructed to upgraded standards: one foot of free-draining gravels or crushed sandstone (new working surface/travel course, maintained as necessary), overlying 18 inches of clay, on top of a single 60 mil thick HDPE geomembrane liner.

The upgraded OPA system will include a truck wash facility with catch basins for wash water and ore pad runoff that is delivered to a double-liner runoff retention pond, as illustrated in Drawings MT13-AC-12 *Appendix A, Ore Pad and Appurtenant Facilities-Plan View*, MT13-AC-13 (*-Sections, Detail E*), and MT13-AC-15 *Ore Pad Runoff Collection and Retention-Note 15*, and as described in *Section 3.3 of the Application Permit Revision 1*.

- d) Upon completion or cessation of mining operations and initiation of final reclamation, the OPA shall be dismantled. Following final removal of residual mined materials and contaminated soil and sediments from the OPA, the operation will excavate and fold the geomembrane liner, either burying it in-place or placing it into an adjacent MWTU pond excavation, replace clean soils to re-establish grade, and revegetate. Requirements of this Condition may be modified with MMD approval.

## **2. Surface Shaping and Stormwater Management**

- a) Following ore, contaminated materials and liner removal, the Permittee shall regrade the OPA in a manner that ensures positive drainage and eliminates, to the extent practicable, ponding on the top surfaces and final cover surfaces. The Permittee shall construct the surfaces to a final grade to direct stormwater to water management conveyances as shown on Drawing MT13-CL-13, *Appendix A, Final Site Grading Plan* in the CCP. RGR shall provide other erosion controls if required by the MMD. All final slopes shall be regraded to no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.

**3. Revegetation Plan**

- a) At the time of final reclamation all contaminated materials will be removed to achieve the cleanup standard in Section L. The Operator will grade the surface for positive drainage and stormwater control, provide erosion resistance, and demonstrate that the cover material is protective of ground water as required by NMED. All slopes and high walls created by excavation of borrow pits shall be no steeper than a 3:1 slope gradient.
- b) The reclaimed OPA shall be ripped to a minimum depth of 12 inches and revegetated in accordance with revegetation standards set forth in Appendix A.

**4. Post-Reclamation Radiological Survey**

The Permittee shall conduct a radiological survey of the disturbed and reclaimed OPA in accordance with the work plan required in Section L of this Permit Revision.

**5. Post-Mining Land Use**

The PMLU for the OPA shall be grazing, in compliance with §19.10.5.507.A NMAC.

**H. PIPELINES**

The following condition applies to process water pipelines and associated disturbances when they are no longer needed for site operations, water treatment or water management. The conditions are required to mitigate the disturbances within the Permit area and provide for stabilization of the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.(1) NMAC. The condition is also required to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A NMAC, and to meet applicable environmental standards as required by §69-36-11.B (4) of the Act and §19.10.5.506.J.5 NMAC.

**1. Demolition and Removal**

The Permittee shall remove and properly dispose of pipelines if not needed for post-reclamation water management.

- a) The treated water discharge pipeline from the MWTU shall be removed and the pipeline corridor shall be regraded in a manner that ensures positive drainage and eliminates, to the extent practicable, ponding on the top surfaces.

**2. Revegetation Plan**

The treated water discharge pipeline corridor shall be revegetated in accordance with revegetation standards set forth in Appendix A.

### **3. Post-Reclamation Radiological Survey**

The Permittee shall conduct a radiological survey of the disturbed and reclaimed pipeline areas in accordance with the work plan required in Section L.

#### **I. MINE SHAFTS**

The Permittee shall seal all shafts and other underground mine openings within the Permit area, unless conflicting with other agency requirements.

##### **1. Demolition, Removal and Closure**

Demolition, removal and closure of the twenty-four-foot diameter production/haulage shaft, the fourteen-foot diameter manway/ventilation shaft, connected access tunnels, and utility corridors for the shafts shall be performed as provided in the CCP per Section 4.1, Shaft Closures, shown in Drawings MT13-CL-05, *Appendix A, Shaft Closure – Manway/Vent* and MT13-CL-06, *Shaft Closure-Production Shaft*, and in CCP Revision 1 Technical Specifications *Appendix C.3, Revision 1, Shaft Plugging and Backfill*.

- a) The Permittee shall conduct a radiological survey of the surface of the reclaimed shaft areas in accordance with the work plan required in Section L.

#### **J. SERVICE AND SUPPORT AREA**

The following conditions apply to facilities within the Service and Support Area, as identified in the Application, Revision 1 Drawing MT13-AC-01, *Appendix A, General Site Plan and Drawing Index*, and on Drawing MT13-CL-02, *Appendix A, Closeout Plan Index Sheet* in the CCP. These conditions are required in order to establish the beneficial use (PMLU) on a Permit area approved by the Director pursuant to §19.10.1.7.P.(5) NMAC, to mitigate the disturbances within the Permit area, and to provide for stabilization of the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.(1) NMAC.

##### **1. Commercial Post-Mining Land Use**

The PMLU shall be commercial for the ancillary facilities and areas identified in Appendix B. These areas are approved as a commercial PMLU subject to the following conditions:

- a) The Permittee shall provide to MMD a building inspection certification signed by a professional engineer, that the buildings are in good condition, meet all applicable codes, are structurally sound, meet all zoning requirements, meet all local ordinances, and all utilities are operable. This certification shall be provided to MMD within 180 days of approval of the Permit Revision, and once every 5 years thereafter.
- b) The Permittee shall submit, for MMD approval, a general erosion control plan to be implemented at closeout for the area covered by the commercial PMLU. The plan shall describe the installation of erosion control features including, but not be limited

to, road design construction, berms, culverts, diversions, dikes, sediment control ponds, revegetation, water bars, armoring or rip rapping. The plan shall be provided to MMD within 180 days of approval of the Permit Revision. The Plan shall be updated at least 90 days prior to implementation of reclamation in consideration of site specific conditions at the time.

- c) The Permittee shall not be released from requirements of the New Mexico Mining Act and Rules for those areas approved as commercial until the commercial PMLU has been implemented. Implementation shall be demonstrated as follows:
1. The Permittee shall conduct a radiological survey of the commercial PMLU area in accordance with the work plan required in Section L.
  2. If soil contamination exists in and around all buildings and facilities for commercial use, the Permittee must demonstrate that any required remediation has been completed for these areas to be utilized for the commercial PMLU.
  3. Maintain documentation that the area comprising the commercial PMLU meets NPDES requirements.
- d) The Permittee shall demonstrate that they have either entered into long-term contractual commitments for the sale, lease or occupancy of a substantial portion of the areas approved for commercial PMLU use with commercial businesses, or can demonstrate to a reasonable certainty that such contractual commitments shall be executed either in conjunction with the release of the corresponding Permit area from the Mining Act or shortly thereafter. MMD shall determine whether the Permittee has complied with those requirements.

## 2. Demolition and Burial

All facilities shall be removed except those that may be left in place under the MMD-approved commercial PMLU. Demolition, removal, and/or burial shall be accomplished by meeting requirements of the following conditions (may be modified with MMD approval following final demolition and burial design):

- a) Where footings, slabs, walls, pavement, manholes, vaults, stormwater controls, and other foundations are not included in the commercial PMLU, are abandoned in place, and not demolished, they shall be covered with topdressing to a depth of 24 inches minimum. The covered foundation areas shall be graded for stormwater control.
- b) Covered footings, slabs, walls, pavement, manholes, vaults, stormwater controls, and other foundations not included in the commercial PMLU shall be revegetated in accordance with Appendix A.

- c) A post-reclamation radiological survey shall be conducted on disturbed portions of the permit area, and where covered footings, slabs, walls, pavement, manholes, vaults, stormwater controls, and other foundation areas are not included in the commercial PMLU in accordance with the work plan required in Section L.

## K. ANCILLARY FACILITIES

### 1. Electrical Distribution System

The Permittee shall remove all electrical systems and infrastructure, including outdoor lighting and transmission lines, not used in the commercial PMLU or not necessary for the site operation and maintenance, including water treatment, prior to release from requirements of the New Mexico Mining Act and Rules. The Permittee shall maintain the remaining portion of the electrical distribution system for the commercial PMLU in satisfactory condition that complies with all applicable building codes and regulations until the commercial PMLU has been implemented. Power poles not required for the electrical distribution system of the commercial PMLU shall be removed unless left in place as raptor habitat and approved by MMD.

### 2. Roads

The following conditions apply to all roads identified in the Permit area and on Drawing MT13-CL-04, *Revision 2, Facility Disposition Plan* in the CCP. These conditions are required in order to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A.

- a) The County Road #334 right of way shall have contaminated soils removed and placed in the Waste Rock Pile Area.
- b) Roads required for continued site maintenance will be identified within 180-days of implementation of reclamation.
- c) Revegetation of reclaimed access roads shall be in accordance with Appendix A.
- d) The Permittee shall conduct a radiological survey of reclaimed access roads and vehicle disturbance areas in accordance with the work plan required in Section L.

### 3. South and North (“Ore Pad Runoff Retention”) Storm Water Ponds

- a) When no longer needed for management of impacted mine site runoff, the South Storm Water Pond, as shown on Drawings MT13-CL-13, *Appendix A, Final Site Grading Plan – Note 6* and MT13-CL-09, *Appendix A, Final Grading and Cover Plan – Waste Rock Pile Area – Note 6*, shall have sediments removed and placed within the SWRP. The pond and related drainage pipes, manholes and concrete spillways will remain as a storm water retention basin. The following conditions may be modified following final pond reclamation design with MMD approval.

- b) During reclamation of the MWTU area the North Storm Water Pond (Ore Pad Runoff Retention Pond) sediments shall be removed and placed within the SWRP as shown on Drawing MT13-CL-07, *Appendix A, Final Grading Plan- Mine Water Treatment Pond and Ore Pad Areas – Note 6*. The following conditions may be modified with MMD approval following final pond reclamation design with MMD approval.
- c) Remaining pond liners, if any, will be consolidated and the pond berms will be pushed into the ponds.
- d) If necessary, the ponds shall be covered with cover material to achieve the performance standard for mine site radiation levels as described in Section L. The cover material may be derived from the berms surrounding the ponds or additional cover material may be required to be placed to achieve the reclamation performance standard in Section L.
- e) The South and North (Ore Pad Runoff Retention) Storm Water Ponds shall be revegetated in accordance with revegetation standards set forth in Appendix A.
- f) The Permittee shall conduct a radiological survey of the surface of the reclaimed South and North (Ore Pad Runoff Retention) Storm Water Ponds in accordance with the work plan required in Section L.

#### **4. Exploration and Development Drill Holes**

The Permittee shall plug and abandon all drill holes within the Permit area in accordance with 19.10.3.302.L NMAC. If the Permittee conducts exploration or development within the Permit area that creates a new disturbance, the Permittee must identify the general areas or locations within the Permit area where drilling activities have taken place, and provide a general plan regarding measures that will be taken to minimize disturbance, enhance stability and control erosion. The Permittee shall also identify any areas of new disturbance due to exploration or development activities in each annual report submitted to MMD. In addition, the Permittee shall describe how these areas will be reclaimed and provide a schedule indicating when the reclamation work will take place. All new disturbed areas related to drilling shall be revegetated in accordance with Appendix A.

#### **5. Water, Dewatering and Monitoring Wells and Utility Conduits**

Unless required to be maintained by NMED under DP-61 or other NMED requirements, or otherwise required for post-closure operations, maintenance or monitoring, or are approved to remain for the commercial PMLU, the Permittee shall abandon all water wells, dewatering wells, utility conduits, and groundwater monitoring wells, in accordance with the requirements of NMED *Monitoring Well Construction and Abandonment Guidelines*; discharge permit DP-61; or the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer regulations in 19.27.7 NMAC.

6. **Mine Shafts**

The Permittee shall seal and safeguard all shafts and other penetrations from the ground surface within the Permit area, unless conflicting with other agency requirements. The Permittee shall submit to MMD for approval a closure plan for underground mine openings 180 days prior to closeout activities. The Permittee shall submit to MMD for approval a bat habitat study that addresses all openings within the Permit area, including the need for and design of bat-compatible enclosures. Openings shall be sealed with bat-compatible enclosures where features are identified as important bat habitat. The study shall be submitted to MMD no less than 180 days prior to closeout activities at any opening.

L. **RADIATION CLEANUP CRITERIA**

1. The mine permit area and affected areas shall be reclaimed in accordance with the *Joint Guidance for the Cleanup and Reclamation of Existing Uranium Mining Operations in New Mexico*, dated March 2016.
2. Radiation levels in the facilities that will be retained for PMLU shall not exceed NMED Radiation Control Bureau 20.3 NMAC criteria for the facilities' unrestricted release and use.
3. The Permittee shall submit to MMD for approval, a reclamation and post-reclamation radiological survey work plan for all disturbed areas and reclaimed mine units, at least 180-days prior to commencement of reclamation.

M. **ADDITIONAL STUDIES**

1. **Affected Areas**

All affected areas, as defined by §19.10.1.7.A.(3) NMAC shall be reclaimed according to §19.10.5.507.A and §19.10.1.7.R.1 NMAC. The Permittee shall identify affected areas pursuant to 19.10.1.7.A(3) NMAC, as required by MMD, prior to the commencement of final reclamation of the mine.

2. **Studies for Other Agencies**

The Permittee shall submit to MMD copies of any work plans or studies for reclamation or closeout of the Permit area and affected areas required by NMED or other agencies. If any submittals to NMED or other agencies indicate that additional or alternative closeout actions are necessary to meet New Mexico Mining Act requirements, MMD may require the Permittee to submit a request to modify or revise the Permit. MMD will review the request to determine if a modification or revision of this Permit is required by §19.10.5.504.B and §19.10.5.505.B NMAC.

3. **South Waste Rock Pile Test Plots**

Test plots shall be developed on the cover of the activation waste cell on the SWRP area (general location depicted on Figure 3-3, *Mine Activation Contaminated Pond Sediment Disposal Cell*, and on Drawing MT13-AC-08, *Revision 1, South Waste Rock Pile at Mine Reactivation – Plan View*), to:

- Provide a site-specific means to demonstrate and document the success of selected plant species, amendments, and planting methods;
- Verify the adequacy of a 2.0 ft. cover thickness (versus 3.0 ft., or greater), where placed, to meet requirements of the *Joint Guidance for the Cleanup and Reclamation of Existing Uranium Mining Operations in New Mexico*, dated March 2016, support vegetation that meets requirements of Appendix A, resist erosion, and to demonstrate that the cover material is protective of ground water as required by NMED;
- Measure and document the radon attenuation performance of the cover with vegetation;
- NMED requests joint submission and approval of all test plot documents and would amend or modify DP-61 to include the study as a new condition.

RGR shall submit a test plot workplan within 180 days after approval of Revision 13-2. These requirements may be modified with MMD approval.

#### **N. FINANCIAL ASSURANCE**

The following conditions are required to ensure that adequate financial assurance is provided for the site, pursuant to §19.10.5.506.J.2, §19.10.12.1202.B, §19.10.12.1204.A, §19.10.12.1206.A, and §19.10.12.1210 NMAC.

1. The Permittee has provided joint financial assurance for the updated November 2013 Closeout Plan in the amount of **\$7,606,477.00** (updated for inflation to 2016; dated 3/31/2017) in the form of an Irrevocable Standby Letter of Credit No. MB60516318, as amended, issued by Bank of the West.
2. The Permittee may apply for and obtain release of financial assurance in accordance with §19.10.12.1210 NMAC.
3. The Permittee shall evaluate the adequacy of the financial assurance approved as a part of the Permit every five years, beginning in 2022 or sooner as required by the Director. This evaluation shall be provided to MMD with the annual report due April 30<sup>th</sup>. If upon review of the evaluation, MMD determines that a change to the financial assurance amount or form is required; the Permittee shall submit to MMD a request to modify or revise the Permit. The Permittee may request a change to the financial assurance in accordance with §19.10.12 NMAC.
4. The Permittee shall not be released from the requirements of the Mining Act for those areas approved as commercial until the commercial PMLU has been implemented as described in condition J.1 of this Permit Revision.

**O. POST-CLOSURE MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE**

**1. Erosion and Sediment Control**

The following conditions apply to the reclaimed areas. The conditions for the reclaimed areas are required to mitigate the disturbances within the Permit area and provide for stabilization of the Permit area that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources in accordance with §19.10.1.7.R.1 NMAC. The conditions are also required to reclaim the Permit area to a condition that allows for re-establishment of a self-sustaining ecosystem as required by §19.10.5.507.A NMAC, and to meet applicable environmental standards as required by §69-36-11.B(4) of the Act and §19.10.5.506.J.5 NMAC.

- a) The Permittee shall visibly inspect reclaimed lands for signs of erosion and shall mitigate significant erosion features to prevent further degradation of the site. Drainage channels, diversion structures, retention ponds, and auxiliary erosion control measures will be inspected, repaired and maintained in accordance with standards identified in the Field Office Technical Guides (FOTG) of the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Section IV-Table of Contents, at <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/treemenuFS.aspx>. Guidance is provided for construction, repair or stabilization, as necessary, utilizing established best management practices. Inspections shall continue until the specific units are released under the New Mexico Mining Act. Inspections shall be conducted monthly for the first year following completion of reclamation construction activities for each unit, and quarterly thereafter. Reclaimed areas shall additionally be inspected for evidence of erosion after storm events of one inch or greater in any one-day period. Inspections shall continue until the specific units are released under the New Mexico Mining Act, unless continued inspections are required by other agencies.
- b) The Permittee shall report evidence of significant rill, gully, or sheet erosion on any reclaimed area within 24 hours of discovery. The Permittee shall then provide the MMD a written report that describes the nature and extent of erosion and a corrective action plan, according to the following schedule. The Permittee shall provide the report within 30 days of discovery. The corrective action plan shall describe the efforts necessary to stabilize the affected area. The plan shall be implemented as soon as practical following regulatory approval.
- c) Erosion control measures that are damaged or ineffective shall be repaired, or re-designed as necessary. The Permittee shall commit to using a variety of erosion control measures, as needed, if erosion control problems develop. Long-term erosion control measures will include the installation of berms, designed channels, and sediment containment structures, as necessary, and shall be designed for a 100-year, 24-hour storm event. Short-term erosion control measures may include, but not be limited to: silt fences, hay bales, water bars, and mulching.

## **2. Noxious Weed Management**

Noxious weeds shall be controlled by the Permittee. Noxious weed management shall consist, at a minimum, of the following:

- a) The Permittee shall perform two inspections in the year after reclamation seeding has been performed (in early growing season [May-June] and after the monsoon season [September]), of all disturbed areas such as roads, and all reclaimed areas within the Permit Area. The inspections shall identify and inventory noxious weeds that are listed in the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Noxious Weed Update List, dated April 1, 2009.
- b) The Permittee shall submit to MMD, within 90-days of the completion of the noxious weed inspections required in §O.2.a of this permit revision (above), a weed control program work plan. The weed control program work plan shall provide species-specific weed control measures and a schedule of inspections for noxious weeds during the post-reclamation period.

## **P. WATER QUALITY**

The Permittee shall submit to MMD a copy of any submittals approved by NMED on ground water modeling, geochemical characterization and modeling, and cover infiltration necessary for closure. The Permittee shall submit to MMD copies of any studies required by NMED under DP-61 and shall submit to NMED copies of plans and submittals required by MMD under this Permit. If any of these submittals indicate that additional or alternative closeout actions are necessary to meet the requirements of the New Mexico Mining Act and Rules, MMD may require the Permittee to submit to MMD a request to modify or revise the Permit. MMD will review the request to determine if a modification or revision of this Permit is required by §19.10.5.504.B and §19.10.5.505.B NMAC.

## **Q. RETURN TO ACTIVE STATUS**

RGR has provided MMD a Gantt chart depicting phased project development components, tasks, upgrades, design and implementation schedules, their relative sequence, and the projected duration of actions and activities necessary to accomplish the reopening, reactivation and upgrade of the Mine (from June 2017 *Mt. Taylor Mine Reactivation Plan – Phases, Tasks, and Sequence; Rev. B-Supplement to Rev. A*). The planning chart is attached to this Revision 13-2, as Appendix C. The progressive completion of these development tasks will be expected to demonstrate tangible progress following final approval and signature of this Revision 13-2, by the Order of the Mining and Minerals Director, below.

To enable MMD to track and verify the listed tasks (and potentially others) for coming-off-standby and resumption of active mine status activities and milestones, the Permittee shall provide quarterly reports to MMD, due on January 31<sup>st</sup>, on April 30 (an annual

summary of the previous twelve months' progress, coincident with required mine permit annual fees and reporting), on July 31, and October 31 of each year. These reports will give an account of the advancement of these and other mine development activities, describe the status of tasks, and present a forecast of future actions. Elements on the Gantt chart in Appendix C may be modified with MMD approval.

MMD may also verify that the mine is in active status through periodic inspections. The quarterly progress reports shall continue until the mine has completed the water treatment system, and mine dewatering has commenced. These requirements may be modified with MMD approval.

**R. TEMPORARY CESSATION**

If, due to a temporary cessation of mining operation exceeding 180 days, or the Permittee wishes to suspend reclamation, the Permittee shall submit an application for a Permit Revision for standby status pursuant to §19.10.5.505 and §19.10.7 NMAC.

Pursuant to the New Mexico Mining Act, NMSA 1978, §69-36-7.E and 19.10.7.701.I NMAC, standby status shall be granted for a maximum term of five years; the Director may renew the standby status for no more than three additional five-year terms, for a total of twenty (20) years. The original term of standby status for the Mt. Taylor Mine was approved by MMD under Revision 99-1 on October 12, 1999. To date, MMD has approved two additional five-year terms of standby status for the Mt. Taylor Mine. The Permittee submitted an application for the third five-year renewal of standby status on October 12, 2014 that MMD is processing under Revision 14-1.

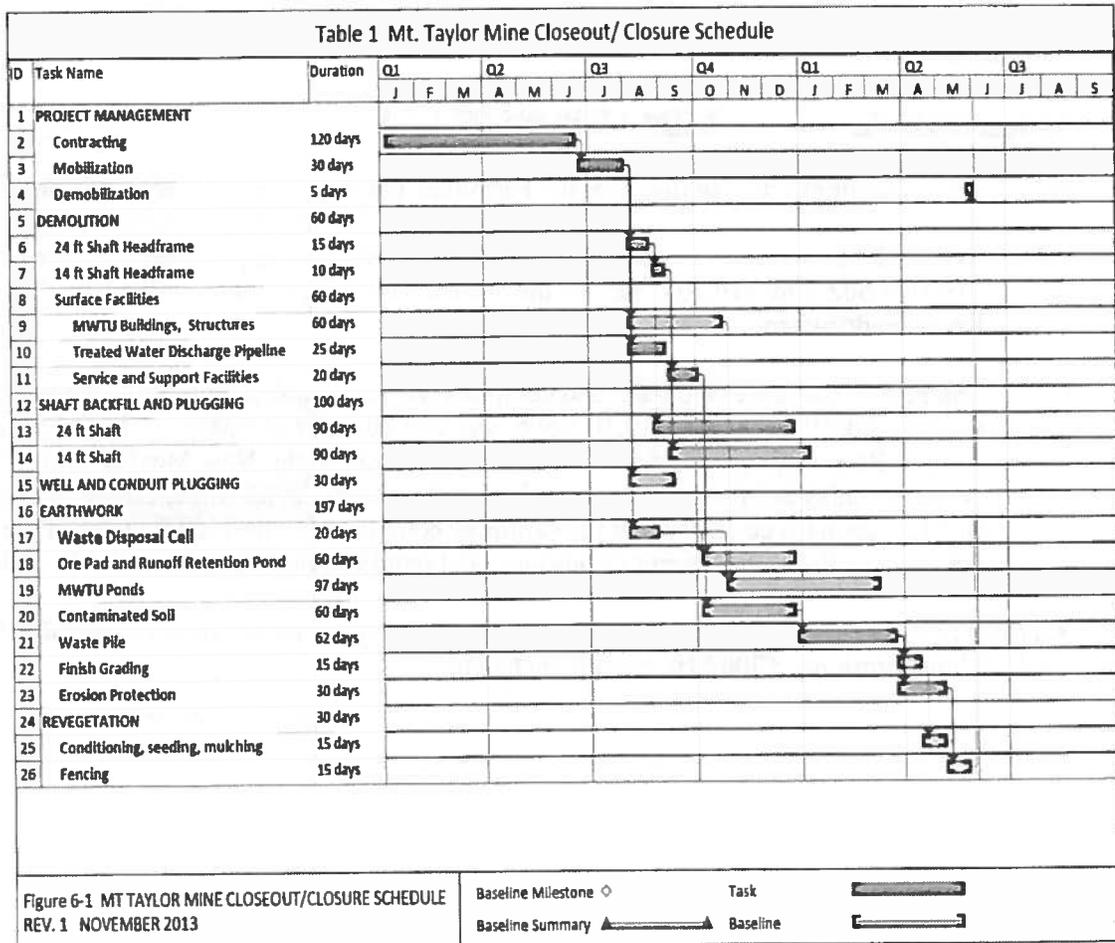
**S. RECLAMATION SCHEDULE**

The Reclamation Schedule is required pursuant to §19.10.5.506.B.1 NMAC. The reclamation of units at the Mount Taylor Mine shall begin in accordance with the schedule identified in Table 1. below, unless earlier reclamation is required by other agencies or is initiated under the requirements below:

During reclamation, measures shall be taken to provide for the stabilization of the disturbances that will minimize future impact to the environment and protect air and water resources. The Permittee may submit for MMD approval a request to modify or revise the Reclamation Schedule.

If, after the Effective Date of this Permit Revision the mine site is in a condition of cessation of mining operations, exceeding a period of 180-days, the Permittee shall either begin reclamation pursuant to the schedule identified on Table 1, below, or submit an application for standby status to MMD. Cessation of mining operations is defined as a stoppage of activities identified in Appendix C, any subsequent mine development, and eventual uranium ore production.

**Table 1. Closeout / Closure Schedule**



In the event the entire operation transitions into permanent cessation, the operator will resubmit a schedule for reclamation, taking into account reasonable timeframes for the reclamation of the remaining mine units. A specified time frame will be provided for the complete reclamation of the site.

**T. COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL PERMITS**

Pursuant to 19.10.5.509.C NMAC, during the term of the Permit issued pursuant to 19.10. NMAC, the Permittee must maintain all state and federal (or other applicable) environmental permits required for the Permit area. Revocation or termination of such a Permit or the forfeiture of financial assurance related to the Permit area by another governmental agency is adequate grounds for the Director to issue a cessation order pursuant to 19.10.11 NMAC.

**U. CLOSEOUT PLAN RENEWAL**

The Permittee shall submit a revised Closeout Plan no later than five years after approval of

this permit revision. Earlier modifications or revisions to a portion, or portions, of the Permit, may be required if the submittals or studies addressed under Condition M warrant such action.

**Section 10 (13-2).**

**CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

- A. The Director has jurisdiction over the Permittee and the subject matter of this proceeding.
- B. The PRP is complete, accurate, and complies with the requirements of the Act and §19.10.5.502 and §19.10.5.503 of the Rules with conditions described in this Permit Revision document.
- C. The PRP is complete, accurate, and complies with the requirements for Closeout Plans in the Act and §19.10.5.505, §19.10.5.506, and §19.10.5.507.A NMAC. The Permittee, Rio Grande Resources Corporation, is permitted pursuant to the New Mexico Mining Act to conduct mining and reclamation operations at the Mount Taylor Mine, Cibola County, New Mexico, upon the condition that the Permittee complies with the requirements of the Order, the Act, the Rules, the Permit Conditions, and requirements imposed by this Decision.

All other provisions, modifications, and revisions for mining and reclamation contained in the Mt. Taylor Mine Permit No. CI002RE, remain unchanged.

**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that I have personally examined and am familiar with the information submitted herein, and based on my inquiry of those individuals responsible for obtaining the information, I believe the submitted information is true, accurate, and complete.

I certify that I have read, understand and will comply with the requirements of this Permit Revision. I also agree to comply with the performance and reclamation standards and requirements of the permit, the Rules, and the Act, and allow the Director to enter the Permit area without delay for the purpose of conducting inspections.

Joe C. Jester  
Authorized Representative of the Permittee

Mine Manager  
Title

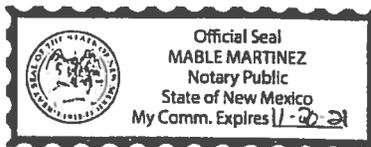
Rio Grande Resources  
Company

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 22 day of November, 2017

Mable Martinez  
Notary Public

My Commission Expires

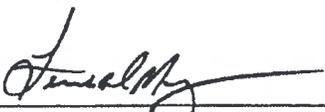
11-22-17  
(date)



**ORDER**

**NOW THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that Permit Revision 13-2 of the Mt. Taylor Mine Permit, approving the transition from standby to active mining status, incorporating the updated Closeout Plan and financial assurance, and allowing Rio Grande Resources Corporation to conduct mining, closeout and reclamation operations in Cibola County, New Mexico, is approved.

**By Order of the Director, Mining and Minerals Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, of the State of New Mexico.**

By:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Fernando R. Martinez, Director  
Mining and Minerals Division  
Energy, Minerals and Natural  
Resources Department

DATED: 12/28/2017

**APPENDIX A.**

**Seeding Methods and Revegetation Standards**

**Table 2. Revegetation Species and Planting Rates**

The reclaimed mine surfaces, except the areas approved as commercial PMLU, will be reseeded using the seed mix in Table 2, below.

Seed Mix	PLS lb./ft <sup>2</sup>	PLS lb./acre	Species Name	Common Name	Life Form	Bunch/Sod	Perennial/Biennial/Annual	Seeds/lb	Average Recommended Seeding Rate PLS lbs/acre	Planting Season
Site Name: Mount Taylor Mine Date: 10/14/2016 Acres to be Seeded: 139 Proposed PLS lbs/acre: 24.00 Proposed PLS # seeds/ft <sup>2</sup> : 68	5	1.00	<i>Penstemon angustifolius</i>	Narrowleaf penstemon	Forb		P	223000	3	
	3	0.30	<i>Sphaeralcea fendleri</i>	Globemallow	Forb			500000		
	11	6.80	<i>Hesperostipa neomexicana</i>	New Mexico needlegrass	Grass-Cool	B		70000	13	
	9	3.60	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	Western wheatgrass	Grass-Cool	S		110000	12	F/S
	9	0.50	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	Blue grama	Grass-Warm	B/S	P	825000	2.5	SU
	9	2.50	<i>Pleuraphis jamesii</i>	Galleta	Grass-Warm	B/S	P	159000	4	
	9	0.20	<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	Alkali sacaton	Grass-Warm	B	P	1750000		
	4	3.40	<i>Atriplex canescens</i>	Fourwing saltbush	Shrub		P	52000	0.5	
	3	1.10	<i>Krascheninnikovia kanata</i>	Winterfat	Shrub		P	123000	5	F-SP
	5	4.60	<i>Cercocarpus montanus</i>	Mountain mahogany	Shrub		P	47400		
	Total <sup>1</sup>		24.00							
warm season grass substitute species <sup>2</sup>	9		<i>Bouteloua eriopoda</i>	Black grama	Grass-Warm	S		1335000	2.5	F/SP

Notes: <sup>1</sup> For broadcast seeding the application rate will be double (48 PLS lb./acre)

<sup>2</sup> Substitutions of any grasses, forbs or shrubs require MMD approval at least 60-days prior to seed application.

**Seeding Methods**

Seedbed preparation will be conducted on the contour to reduce erosion. Disking will be utilized to:

- ameliorate compaction of the topdressing to facilitate penetration of roots by seedlings;
- prevent surface crusting of the topdressing; and
- eliminate large clods of soil or cover material.

Seed will be applied by either rangeland drill or broadcast methods. Seeding methods may be determined by the steepness of the slope. The disturbed area will be seeded using standard mine reclamation equipment; i.e., tracked and wheeled tractors, rangeland seed drill, and mulch

application in areas with slopes of 3H:1V or flatter. All reseeded areas will be mulched utilizing native grass mulch, straw or other approvable mulch material at an application rate of 1.5 to 2.0 tons per acre. The mulch will be mechanically applied and subsequently crimped to reduce wind loss and stacking. Reclaimed slopes steeper than 3H:1V including natural and cut slopes east of the shafts may be seeded using a combination of manual and mechanical application techniques, including broadcasting seeding followed by, where practicable, chains dragged by a tracked dozer to incorporate the seed with the soil.

### **Seed Origin and Quality**

All seed must be certified, weed-free, and each seed bag must have attached to it a complete label with certification information. Seed labels or copies of seed labels shall be submitted to MMD within 30-days after seeding.

### **Revegetation Success**

#### **Revegetation Success Standard**

Quantitative vegetation data shall be collected from undisturbed vegetation on the area north of Marquez Canyon arroyo (i.e., reference area) to establish revegetation success standards, which will include:

- percent canopy cover,
- species diversity, and
- shrub density (number of stems/ac.)

RGR shall submit a work plan for MMD approval for quantitative vegetation sampling of the reference area and reclaimed areas within 180-days of approval of the updated closeout plan under this permit revision. The reference area shall be protected from livestock grazing.

The vegetation success standards will be based on the results of the quantitative vegetation sampling of the reference area. Sites for each vegetation type to be sampled will be at least one acre in size. Vegetation types to be sampled for the revegetation success standard will be representative of the undisturbed area near the mine. Vegetation sampling will be done during the peak period of the growing season, September 1 through mid-October.

All data and copies of all documents and reports used to establish the vegetation standards will be submitted to MMD within 90-days of the sampling event(s). Vegetation types to be sampled for developing the vegetation standard should be in as good or better condition and should be representative of areas not currently disturbed by mining.

The Revegetation Success Standard may be modified with MMD approval based on the results of the demonstration plots or the test plots South Waste Rock Pile.

### **Implementation**

Revegetation will occur incrementally on the waste pile slopes and after completion of other closeout activities on the other disturbed land surfaces. Implementation of revegetation will be

performed in accordance with the approved closeout plan and the conditions of this permit revision. Vegetation establishment monitoring of reseeded areas will be conducted during the third year after seeding, with the objective of determining the adequacy of reseeding efforts. Subsequent quantitative revegetation success monitoring of the reclaimed areas shall occur during the sixth year after seeding and in the last two years of the twelve-year revegetation period. The period of responsibility will continue after completion of closeout until release of financial assurance. The Permittee shall notify MMD at least 14-days in advance of vegetation sampling events so that MMD may observe the sampling event.

### **Revegetation Success Criteria**

The reclaimed and reference areas shall have quantitative vegetation surveys performed in year six after seeding and in two out of the last four years of the twelve-year vegetation re-establishment period using the same quantitative vegetation sampling methods in the reclaimed areas and the reference area. After the twelve-year vegetation establishment period, the revegetation will be considered successful for vegetation percent canopy cover, species diversity, and shrub density of the reclaimed area are equal to or greater than 70% of the reference area at a 90% statistical confidence level.

### **Sample Adequacy**

Reclaimed areas will be sampled separately to allow separate determination of sample adequacy. On the revegetated disturbed areas, the transects will be located randomly as approved in the work plan.

The minimum sample size shall be determined by using:

- The Nmin value using the methods of Cochran, W.G., 1977. *Sampling Techniques*, 3rd ed. John Wiley and Sons, New York, N.Y.; or
- An alternative method approved by MMD.

Parameters shall be tested at the 90 percent confidence level that the sample means for total live cover, and shrub density are within 10 percent of the true population mean. At least 60-days prior to the quantitative vegetation sampling event, RGR shall submit for MMD approval the proposed location of the vegetation monitoring transects.

### **Sampling Methods**

The following sampling methods for conducting vegetation studies will be used for determining revegetation success of reclaimed areas:

#### **Percent Canopy Cover**

Percent canopy cover will be sampled as approved in the work plan. Transects will be randomly placed within the reference area and revegetated areas. At least 60-days prior to the quantitative vegetation sampling event, RGR shall submit for MMD approval the proposed randomization methods used for the vegetation monitoring transects.

### **Species Diversity**

The vegetation standard for diversity for the revegetated area is at least three native perennial grasses, two native perennial forbs, and two native perennial shrub species. The minimum occurrence of native perennial warm season grasses and native perennial shrubs shall be at least one percent of cover. The minimum occurrence of native perennial cool season grasses shall be 0.5 percent of cover and the minimum occurrence of native perennial forbs shall be 0.1 percent of cover.

### **Shrub Density**

Shrub density will be measured by exact count. In revegetated areas, the counts will be made as approved in the work plan. The standard for shrub density will be 70 percent of the shrub density in the reference area at a 90% statistical confidence level.

**APPENDIX B.**

**Table 5.1 Building List – Demolish and Retain**

Building Name	Building Type	Dimensions	Volume, ft <sup>3</sup>	Disposition at Closeout	
				Demolish	Retain for Owner PMLU**
Compressor Building	Steel frame and siding	40'4" x 40'2" x 16'	25921		X
York Chiller (Chill Water) Building	Steel frame and siding	100' x 50' x 30'	150000		X
Pump Building (Chill Water Pump House)	Steel frame and siding	40' x 24' x 16'	15360		X
Chlorine Building	Concrete Block	23' x 50'6" x 20'	23230	X	
Shaft Heating Building	Steel frame and siding	50' x 30' x 16'	24000	X	
Glycol Heat Exchanger	Steel frame and siding	50 x 30 x 16	24000	X	
Hoist House	Steel frame and siding	162' x 120' x 40'	777600		X
Cooling Tower	Steel frame and siding	75 x 25 x 25	46875	X	
Guard House (Security Building)	Steel frame and siding	63' x 20'6" x 16'	20664		X
Fire Equipment Building (Fire House)	Steel frame and siding	27' x 24' x 16'	10368		X
Service Building (Office and Warehouse)	Steel frame and siding	194' x 138' x 24'	642528		X
Car (Maintenance) Shop	Steel frame and siding	150' x 100' x 30'	450000		X
Carpenter Shop	Steel frame and siding	45' x 24' x 16'	17280		X
Electrical Building	Steel frame and siding	62' x 30' x 16'	29760	X	
Water Treatment and Boiler Building	Steel frame and siding	62' x 50' x 16'	49600	X	
Core Storage Building	Steel frame and siding	100' x 38' x 16'	60800		X

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 Mount Taylor Mine  
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Fan Shop	Steel frame and siding	40' x 30' x 12'	14400		X
Storage Buildings (2)	Steel frame and siding	28' x 30' x 16'	13440		X
Flocculant Treatment Facility	Steel frame and siding	30' x 23' x 12'	8280	X	
Barium Chloride Treatment Facility	Steel frame and siding	40' x 25' x 16'	16000	X	
Ion Exchange Plant	Steel frame and siding	140' x 70' x 40'	392000	X	
Mo-Se Facility ***	Steel Frame and Siding	234.2' x 70' x 40'	655760	X	
Portable building	Steel Frame and Siding	12' x 12' x 8'	1152	X	
Fuel Pump House	Steel Frame and Siding	10' x 15' x 8'	1200		X
Access/Utility Tunnel	Concrete				X
Sanitary Treatment Plant	Concrete; steel	70' x 30' x 6'; 40' x 20' x 8'	1260; 2000	X	
Septic Tank and Leach Field	various		1		X
Water Tank	Steel		300,000 gal.		X
Fuel Storage Tanks	Steel		various	X	

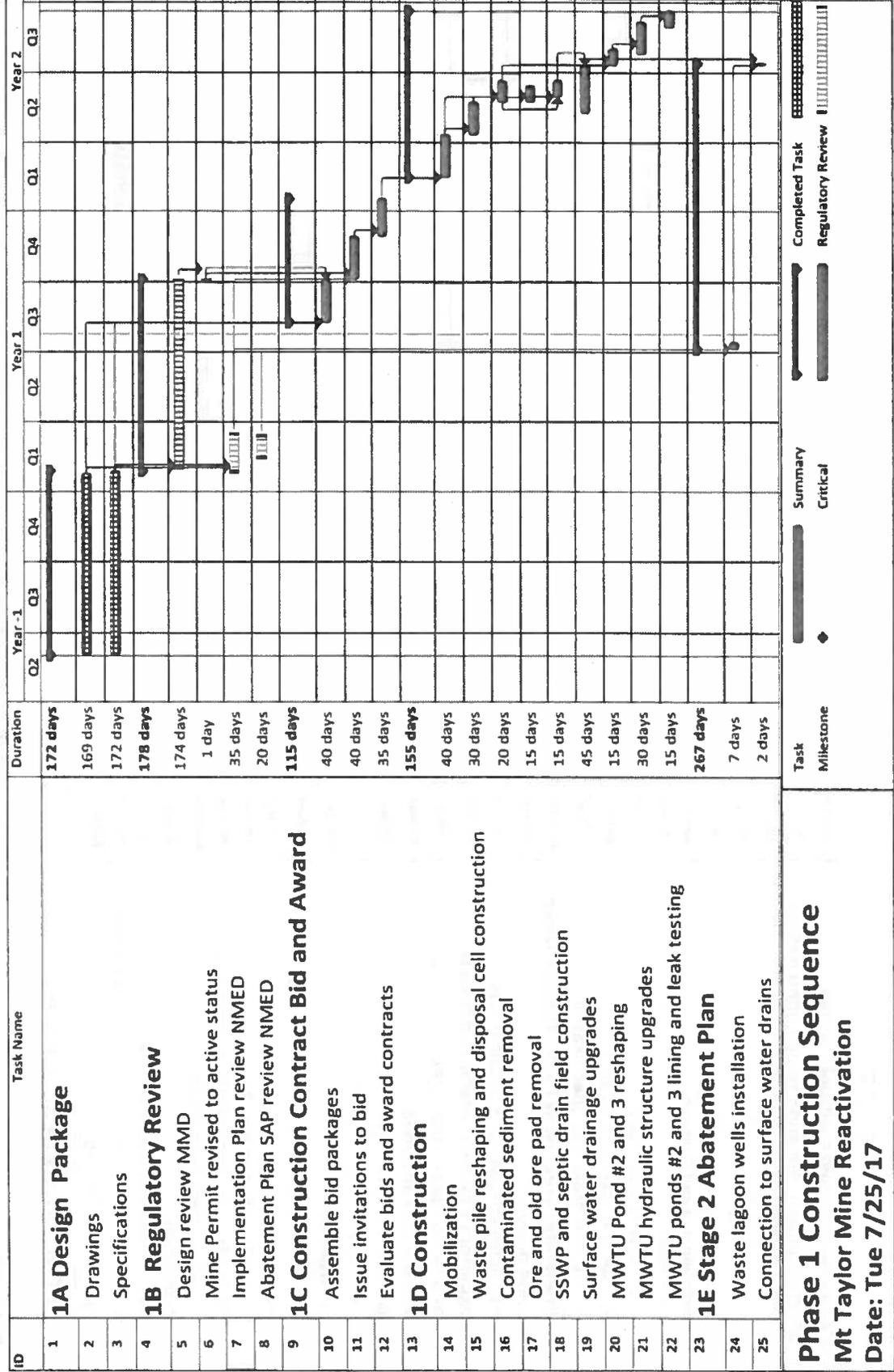
**\*\* Other facilities to be retained for PMLU by owner: Phase I water wells to remain (to Pt. Lookout aquifer, see Drawing MT13-CL-04, Revision 1, Facility Disposition Plan);**

**\*\*\* Amended cost estimate & FA includes separate Mo-Se ion exchange building that may be constructed near Ion Exchange Plant.**

**APPENDIX C:**

**Mine Reactivation Plan**

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**Phase 1 Construction Sequence**  
**Mt Taylor Mine Reactivation**  
**Date: Tue 7/25/17**

(Page 2 of 4)

ID	Task Name	Duration	Year 1			Year 2			Year 3			
			Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	
1	<b>2A Complete Surface Facilities Design</b>	140 days										
2	MWTU ponds 1, 4-8 and ore pad pond design	18 days										
3	Waste pile reshaping design	10 days										
4	Ore pad design	45 days										
5	Pad earthwork and liner	15 days										
6	Pad plumbing and drainage	15 days										
7	Truck wash	15 days										
8	Surface piping upgrades	30 days										
9	Electrical & mechanical design	80 days										
10	Construction drawings, specifications	60 days										
11	<b>2B Mine Water Treatment Plant Upgrade Design</b>	230 days										
12	Process design	150 days										
13	Construction drawings, specifications	120 days										
14	<b>2C Regulatory Reviews - MMD and NMED</b>	60 days										
17	<b>2D Radiological Materials License - NMED</b>	20 days										
18	<b>2E Contract Bids and Awards</b>	90 days										
19	Waste pile earthwork contract	40 days										
20	Mine water treatment contract	60 days										
21	<b>2F Construction</b>	250 days										
22	Water pile earthwork	70 days										
24	Mobilization	20 days										
24	Waste pile reshaping completion	70 days										
25	Waste pile cover, disposal cell cap completion	30 days										
26	Mine water treatment plant	240 days										
27	Mobilization	40 days										
28	Radium treatment system rehabilitation	140 days										
29	Water treatment (U, Mo, Se) plant refit & construction	200 days										
30	<b>2G Exploration Drilling</b>	130 days										

**Phase 2 Construction Sequence**  
 Mt Taylor Mine Reactivation  
 Thu 6/15/17

Regulatory Review

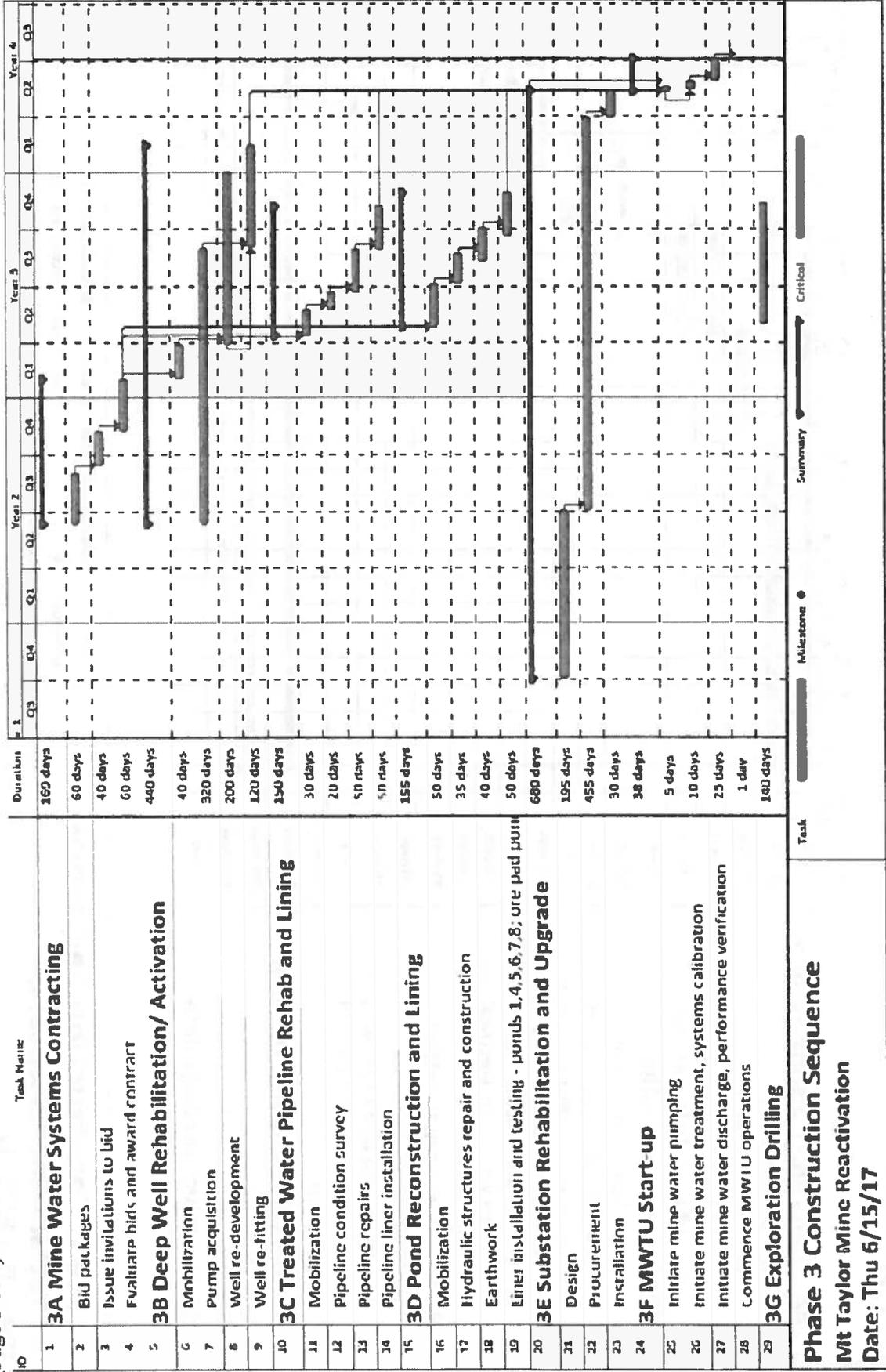
Task

Milestone

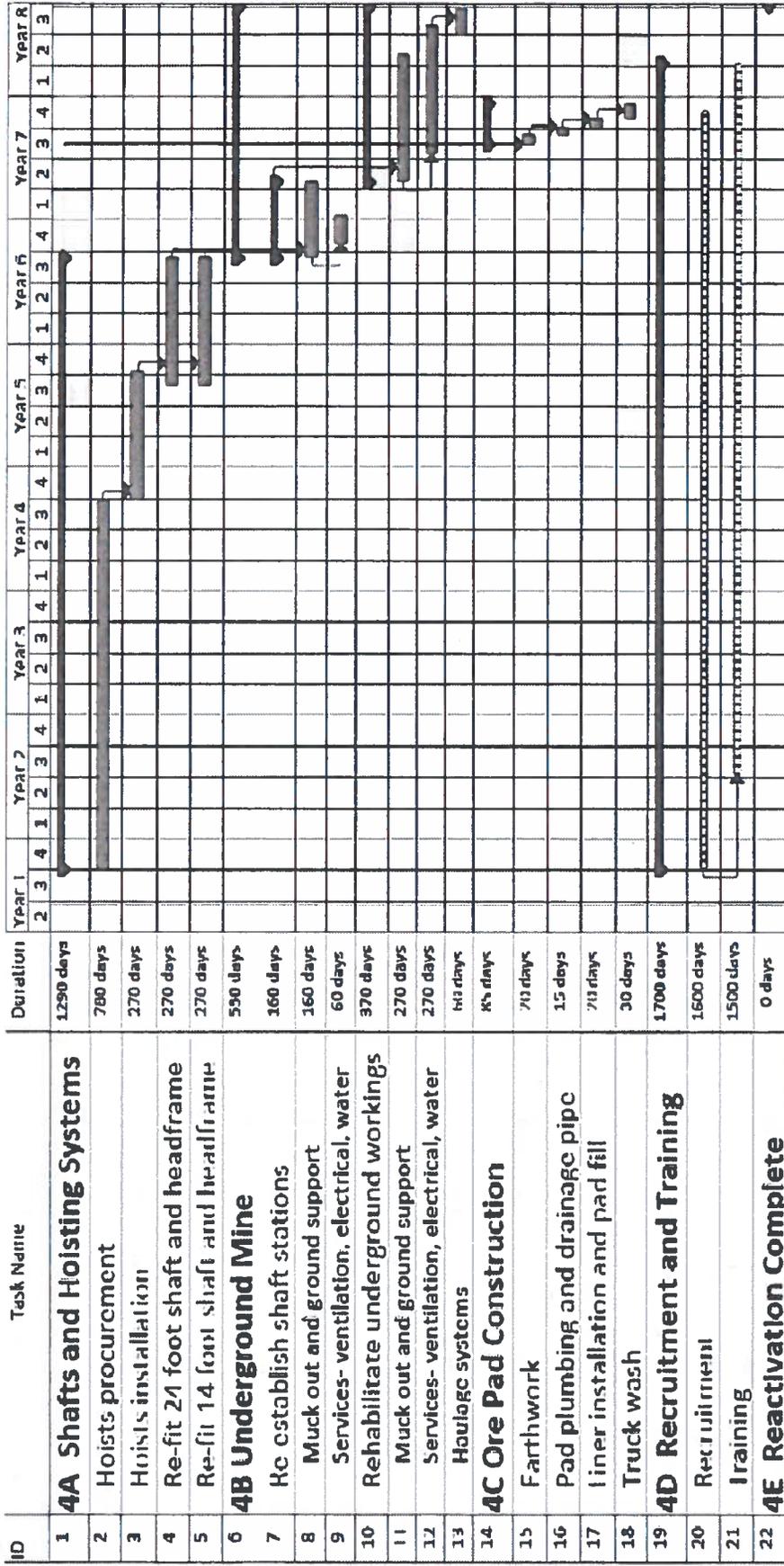
Summary

Critical

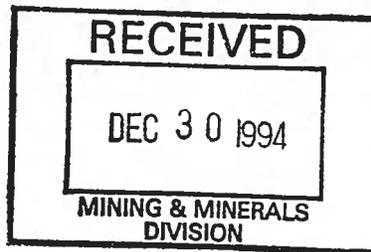
(Page 3 of 4)



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**Phase 4 Construction Sequence**  
**Mt Taylor Mine Reactivation**  
 Date: Thu 6/22/17



PERMIT APPLICATION CERTIFICATION

MOUNT TAYLOR MINE

RIO GRANDE RESOURCES CORPORATION

**PERMIT APPLICATION**

**MOUNT TAYLOR MINE**

**RIO GRANDE RESOURCES CORPORATION**

Submitted with this application are the following documents:

*[Handwritten signature]*

*[Handwritten signature]*

Authorized Agent of Rio Grande Resources Corporation

SUBMITTED TO

MINING AND MINERALS DIVISION

ENERGY, MINERALS AND NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

DECEMBER 20, 1994

Prepared by:

AK GeoConsult, Inc.



RECEIVED  
MAY 2 1994  
MOUNT TAYLOR MINE

**PERMIT APPLICATION CERTIFICATION**

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**MOUNT TAYLOR MINE**  
**RIO GRANDE RESOURCES CORPORATION**

*I certify that I have personally examined and am familiar with the information submitted herein, and based on my inquiry of those individuals responsible for obtaining the information, I believe the submitted information is true, accurate, and complete.*

Signed: *Joe C. Lister*

Title: *Mine Manager*  
Authorized Agent for Rio Grande Resources Corporation

Date: *12 - 27 - 94*

## 9.0 OPERATION PLAN

### 9.1 Mining Operations

The resumption of mining operations at the Mt. Taylor Mine is dependent upon the uranium market conditions, which are subject to influences and changes that cannot be accurately predicted at this time. However, it is anticipated that mining operations will resume not earlier than the year 2000 nor later than the year 2010. Approximately five years of preparatory activities will be required prior to the actual resumption of ore extraction from the mine. This five-year period will be required to remove ground water from the shafts, drifts, and surrounding host rock; for refitting and stabilization of the shafts; for installation of ventilation and electrical service to the underground spaces; and for the reactivation of surface support facilities. The actual configuration, sequence, and rate of mining will depend on ground conditions and ore grades as they are encountered during mining.

For planning purposes the underground mine space is intended to be limited by the vertical projection of the surface permit area. That is, mining will be conducted out to but not beyond the geographic limits of the permit area as defined on Figure 2.

As appropriate or necessary for stabilization of mine space, waste rock may be moved from one underground location to another, or from the surface waste pile to underground locations, to backfill and stabilize mine openings. The actual locations, volumes and rates of waste rock movement to or within the underground cannot be determined until mining operations resume underground.

### 9.2 Expected Concurrent Reclamation

Due to the type of mining conducted at the Mt. Taylor Mine, i.e. deep underground mining, there will be relatively little surface disturbance. The disturbance that has occurred to date represents the majority of total disturbance that will occur through the life cycle of the mining operation. Consequently, little if any concurrent reclamation is expected to be performed during the operating life of the mine, primarily because all surface facilities will remain active as long as any underground operations are being conducted. Until a detailed closeout plan is developed, the possibility of concurrent reclamation cannot be determined in detail; but at the time this permit application was prepared, RGR expects not to be able to conduct any concurrent reclamation during the mining period.

