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November 3, 2022

New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division Teams with BLM on Award-Winning Abandoned Mine Safeguard Project

SANTA FE, NM – A multi-year project to make an abandoned mine site in southwest New Mexico safe for public recreational use has earned the Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) special recognition from the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAMLN).

The 2022 Remediation of Physical Safety Hazards Award was presented to MMD and the Las Cruces District office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for their joint remediation work in the Cookes Peak Mining District, just north of Deming, New Mexico. Working in concert, MMD and BLM safeguarded nearly 300 mine features in this area with historic ties to lead and silver mining.

The BLM stated its intent to open this mountainous area to more recreational use as early as 2012. Private ranches had blocked access to key areas before the BLM created a road segment to give the public closer access to the high mountain peak. The federal agency then provided grant funds to MMD's Abandoned Mine Land Program to work on reducing safety hazards in the area. That was the beginning of what is now the award-winning Cookes Peak Mine Safeguard Project.

Throughout the project, BLM and MMD shared National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and construction duties over multiple phases of work. Four different construction contractors were hired to develop methods of safeguarding 291 mine features surrounding the mountain peak, many located on steep terrain with no road access. The contractors employed a helicopter to transport materials and equipment from staging areas to the individual mine features in these remote locations.

The project site was located in and adjacent to a BLM Wilderness Study Area so extra care was taken to minimize surface disturbance as much as possible and to investigate the full extent of wildlife usage before a mine feature was closed.

Safe public access

“The Cookes Peak Mine Safeguard Project was a great success, and we are pleased to say we have made it possible for recreationists to enjoy the area without the threat of getting hurt in abandoned mines,” said Mike Tompson, MMD’s AML Program Manager.

Closing abandoned mines using federal money is a thorough process that can take years to complete. The process starts by working with landowners to access mines and continues with compliance of the NEPA. Public comment is sought, endangered plant and animal species are identified, and historical artifacts are protected. The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program is funded by the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement through a nationwide fee on coal production and through grants provided by the BLM.

The National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs consists of 32 states and tribes across the United States. The group meets annually to provide a forum to address current issues, discuss common problems, and share new technologies regarding the reclamation of abandoned mine lands. It also strives to foster positive and productive relationships between the members and the federal government.

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.
<https://www.emnrd.nm.gov>



Left to Right: Jeff Graves (NAAML President), Meghan McDonald, James Hollen, Steve Fluke (NAAML Hardrock Committee Chair), Laurence D’Alessandro, Chris Teske (BLM), Leeland Murray, Lloyd Moiola, Mike Tompson, Yeny Maestas