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Governor Bill Richardson Applauds Decision to Withdraw Desert Rock Assessment

BIA Decision Further Imperils Controversial Coal-Fired Power Plant

SANTA FE –Governor Bill Richardson today applauded the decision by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs to withdraw a Biological Assessment of the proposed Desert Rock Energy Project. This decision follows a September 2009 decision by the U.S. Environmental Appeals Board to remand the air quality permit for the Desert Rock Energy Facility to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Taken together, both decisions will significantly delay and create a much more thorough environmental impact review of the proposed coal-fired power plant slated for Navajo Nation lands in New Mexico.

“This decision is a positive one for the quality of the air we breathe and water we drink,” said Governor Richardson. “I share the BIA’s concerns with this proposed plant’s impacts on important fish species in the San Juan River. We must protect this vital fishery for the tourism and recreational dollars it pumps into northwestern New Mexico.”

The EPA granted Desert Rock a permit in July 2008 but asked for a voluntary remand in September 2009 to reconsider issues brought up in the appeal by the State of New Mexico. The State of New Mexico had appealed the permit for the proposed northwestern New Mexico coal-fired power plant arguing that the EPA did not take into account important environmental factors when it granted the permit.

“This decision essentially sends Desert Rock back to the drawing board,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “Moving forward, we are confident that the BIA and EPA will agree with the State of New Mexico that there should be no new coal plants without the latest and greatest environmental controls including limits on greenhouse gas emissions.”

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