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**Environment Department Opposes NRC's Proposal to Limit Environmental Impact
Statements for In-Situ Uranium Leach Mining in New Mexico**

Secretary Curry Sends Letter to NRC Detailing State's Concerns

(Santa Fe, NM) – New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry sent a letter to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission today criticizing its proposal to use a Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement for in-situ leach uranium mining in New Mexico.

The state opposes that process because it blocks the ability of residents to have meaningful involvement in the federal approval process for uranium mining facilities and fails to apply an in-depth analysis specific to each in-situ leach uranium mining site in New Mexico.

“Given the unique environmental, geographical, cultural, historical, economic and regional aspects of our state, it is contrary to the goals and purposes of the National Environmental Policy act for the NRC to use a GEIS approach in this instance,” said New Mexico Environment Secretary Ron Curry. “Residents must be able to participate in this process because of the potential impacts in our state created by renewed uranium mining and past effects of those operations on the health of residents and pollution of the environment.”

A GEIS, used as a tool to determine information about uranium recovery facilities in New Mexico, is often used to broadly interpret conditions at each site. Instead of performing an in-depth environmental review for each license application in New Mexico, the NRC through the GEIS process would only conduct an environmental assessment at each site and rely on the GEIS for the majority of its analysis.

In the letter, Secretary Curry requests that an Environmental Impact Statement, specific to each site be completed because of New Mexico's unique groundwater, air quality, geologic, historic, and cultural issues (The letter is attached). Secretary Curry offers numerous reasons why the commission's approach is flawed.

The majority of uranium resources in New Mexico are located in the Grants Mineral Belt in the northwestern portion of the state, where large sections are on Indian lands, the letter states. In addition, any proposed in-situ leach uranium recovery and processing operation in New Mexico will pose cultural and environmental justice issues that the GEIS process can not adequately address.

The proposed GEIS is contrary to the state's commitment to full public participation in its permitting processes, where each permit is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, the letter states. An individual review is important for uranium operations because of the extensive history of environmental degradation and public impacts in New Mexico that resulted from past uranium mining and milling.

Secretary Curry also notes that operators of proposed in-situ leach facilities must obtain a water right or appropriation permit from the Office of the State Engineer to extract water from the ground. In addition, all surface water discharges from in-situ leach operations require National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Those permits cover discharges of process wastewaters, storm water and construction general storm water.

The state sent letters to the NRC on the GEIS process after the commission began studying the cumulative impact of proposed in-situ leach facilities across the western U.S.

Governor Richardson sent a letter to NRC Chairman Dale Klein last year expressing the same concerns. For more information, call Marissa Stone at (505) 827-0314.

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