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SEPTEMBER 26, 2016

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## PRESIDENT BEGAYE SAYS REMEDIATION OF COVE AREA ABANDONED MINES NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED IMMEDIATELY



Pictured above is one of the abandoned uranium mines that President Begaye visited during the U.S. EPA's tour. Many of these mines are located in areas where access is a major obstacle to clean up and remediation.

COVE/RED VALLEY N.M.-On Thursday, Sep. 22, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye participated in a tour of abandoned uranium mines in the Cove Chapter area to see first-hand the challenges in clean-up.

The tour was facilitated by U.S. EPA and was attended by Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclahbito, Cove, Gad Íí'áhi/ Tóko'í, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooí, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé Alnáozt'í'í) and Cove Chapter Vice President Thomas Young Sr., as well as representatives from pertinent departments.

These particular abandoned uranium mines have affected the community by contaminating the ground water, the land and infiltrating the livelihood of community members, plant and animal life.

"Today we stood at the mouth of a mine that has not been reclaimed and nothing has been done to remediate it. The mine affects water run-offs that lead into washes which ulti-

mately end up in the San Juan River," President Begaye said. "We have children and animals that utilize these waters. This situation is critical and needs to be addressed immediately."

The U.S. EPA prioritized visits to two mine sites that have the most critical impacts to the water, vegetation and the community. The tour emphasized the challenges of accessing the mines in traveling roads and paths that have not been maintained and subsequently have deteriorated to being almost impassable.

"The biggest challenges right now are access, roads and infrastructure. These mines are in very steep terrain," said Clancy Tenley, Assistant Director of the Superfund Division of the EPA Region 9. "Our first priority is to get out and see these mines and then prioritize them so we can start the clean-up on those that pose the worse problems and that are the most important to the chapter, the president and the Navajo agencies."

According to Delegate Crotty, who represents Cove Chapter,



During the tour, President Begaye was given first-hand observations of the challenges that exist in accessing these mines. Roads and access trails leading to these abandoned mines are unkept and eroded.

the Cove community has suffered through the legacy of uranium through upward of 60 years. It has impacted their families, their health, their livestock and their land, she said.

“We now have the resources because of the settlement, because we have the proper studies, and because we have technical assistance. Now we are finally at a point where we can provide justice to this area and to the community members. We no longer want the community to face the challenges of uranium contamination,” she said.

During the tour President Begaye contended that the U.S. EPA should have stepped in to assist in remediation at an earlier stage, rather than having waited for the Navajo Nation to be awarded a settlement from the TRONOX case in the amount of approximately 980 million dollars.

“They should have been on top of this from the very beginning and they were not,” he said. “Once again they failed the Nation by not addressing this in a timely manner. Yet, now that we’ve won a lawsuit, they are very much interested.”

Assistant Director Tenley said that facilitating this tour and

partnership between the U.S. EPA, the Navajo Nation and affiliated departments and programs is conducive to moving forward in assisting the Nation toward the process of remediation.

“We’re very pleased that President Begaye, Council delegate Crotty and Chapter officials were able to join us here,” he said. “This is a large, challenging project and it’s going to take the partnership of us all to get it done.”

President Begaye said it was very important for Navajo leadership to see first-hand the priority sites and assess how they can collectively move together to provide swift remediation.

“These abandoned uranium mines affect the health of our community members, not only now but generationally. The contamination from these mines impacts our water system,” he said. “Remediation should have started years ago. Having toured these mines and seen first-hand the urgency of their impacts, the Navajo Nation will start the process of remediation in a swift manner.”

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