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September 1, 2020

Mining and Minerals Division Initiating Three Safeguarding and Reclamation Projects

SANTA FE - The Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department is initiating three construction projects to safeguard and reclaim abandoned mines in the state. The projects getting underway this week are funded by a federal grant from U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. MMD's Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Program will work with multiple contractors on the projects in line with COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Sweatt Construction of Artesia, NM will be constructing the Swastika Mine and Dutchman Canyon Maintenance and Stream Reclamation Project west of Raton. The project is a follow-up to a 2012 project that reclaimed coal waste piles (gob) and placed meanders into a straightened stream channel. The current project will mitigate erosional issues and restore vegetation washed out from extreme storms that took place immediately after the initial project was completed. The riparian area will benefit from the planting of thousands of riparian plugs, willow cuttings and cottonwood poles being grown at the native plant nursery of the Santa Ana Pueblo.

The Tin Pan Canyon Gob Reclamation Project is also located near Raton and will be constructed by San Isidro Permaculture of Santa Fe. The project entails stabilizing a coal gob pile located next to an intermittent stream by constructing terraces made of straw bales, adding amendments and planting over 6,000 seedlings. A rock rundown will also be built in the waste pile to stabilize an erosional gully that is threatening an adjacent road.

MineGates Environmental of Prescott, AZ will be safeguarding 52 hazardous abandoned mine features north of Deming as part of the Cookes Peak West Mine Safeguard Project – Phase IIIB. The company will be preserving the historical nature of the mine and protecting bat and bird habitat by installing steel gates over openings using a helicopter to deliver the structures on the rocky hillsides. The open shafts and adits are a result of former mining of lead and zinc that took place off and on from 1876 to 1965.

“The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program provides significant benefit to New Mexico by removing public safety hazards, reclaiming mine sites, and providing jobs for workers with local companies that receive construction contracts and professional services contracts,” stated Sarah Cottrell Propst, Cabinet Secretary of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department.

September 1, 2020

Page 2

It is estimated that there are more than 10,000 mine hazards scattered throughout New Mexico that remain un-reclaimed. The New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program has closed more than 4,500 hazardous mine openings and reclaimed numerous mine waste piles since its inception. Inactive or abandoned mine sites are extremely hazardous and potential visitors to these sites are advised to exercise extra caution when exploring these areas. The best safety practice to follow is to “Stay Out and Stay Alive”.

The federal agency collects a fee of 28 cents per ton of mined coal that pays for the reclamation of abandoned mines throughout the country. The law authorizing the fee is set to expire in September 2021. However, several bills are currently being considered to reauthorize the fund.

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

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