Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Carl Shaw (202) 343-4576
For Immediate Release: December 12, 1986
Print PDF

A negotiated agreement for reclamation of the Jackpile Mine in New Mexico between the Pueblo of Laguna and Anaconda Minerals Company, former operators of the nation's largest open-pit uranium mine, was signed today by the Denver based company and approved by the Department of the Interior. The Laguna tribal council has already approved the agreement and will formally sign it in ceremonies in Albuquerque December 18. Anaconda has agreed to pay the Laguna tribe $43.6 million to reclaim the more than 2,600 acres of land disturbed by the company during a 30-year mining operation. The first of five annual installments of $8.72 million will be paid to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) within a few days for investment for the Indian tribe until contracts to begin actual reclamation of the mine can be signed

"We believe this is a fair and equitable agreement for all parties concerned," Ross Swimmer, Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and head of the BIA, said. "It is one of six reclamation proposals -- including alten1atives submitted by Anaconda and the Pueblo of Laguna -- contained in the final environmental impact statement.- We have assurances from the tribe that this plan fully meets with their approval, and it meets the safety requirements if the Environmental Protection Agency."

Swimmer said the agreement officially terminates the Anaconda lease signed with the tribe in 1953. The company has not done any mining in the area near Paguate, about 40 miles west of Albuquerque, since 1982 when it began discussions with the BIA and the tribe on a reclamation plan. BIA has utilized the expertise of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in studying the environmental impacts and development of recommendations for reclamation of the land. The agreement was reached after four years of public hearings and exhaustive technical studies.

Under the approved plan. BIA will sign a contract with the tribe for most of the work to be done. Request for proposals are expected to be issued soon for such work as technical assistance control, engineering and design work and the actual reclamation work that probably will be sub-contracted to a tribal construction firm. Reclamation work is not expected to be completed for at least 10 years, and another 10 years will be spent monitoring the land during which time the area will undergo revegetation, testing of ground water and security fencing.

Earlier this month the BIA and BLM signed a "Record of Decision” setting the level of reclamation work to be done. The decision calls for the stabilization and sealing of underground mines to prevent entry; four-feet of soil backfilling over the pits to prevent radon gas from seeping out and to eliminate water in pit bottoms; and re-sculpturing the dump piles with slanting side angles to allow easier plant rooting. The top 15 feet of the steep vertical high walls would be cut to 45-degree angles for stability and safety purposes. After complete reclamation, the site will be similar in shape, color and texture to the surrounding landscape.