Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Following extensive environmental and economic analyses and robust tribal and public outreach, Deputy Secretary of the Interior Mike Connor today approved the Four Corners Power Plant (FCPP) and Navajo Mine Energy Project in northwestern New Mexico, under a plan that would minimize and mitigate the project's projected environmental impacts while maintaining the substantial economic benefits of coal mining and energy production for the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe and local communities.

The executed Record of Decision (ROD) approves a 25-year site lease extension with the Navajo Nation for the Four Corners Power Plant, authorizes continued mining operations to supply the power plant's remaining units, renews transmission line and access road rights-of-way on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations, and accepts the proposed mining plan for the Navajo Mine.

The project will support continued operation of the remaining two units at FCPP and is expected to support 2,340 jobs statewide and may produce as much as $40 to 60 million annually in direct revenue for the Navajo Nation. Of the action alternatives considered by DOI, the preferred alternative would permit the smallest area, minimize impacts to water resources and air quality and allow the fewest roadways compared to other proposed action alternatives. It also includes protections for wildlife, cultural and archaeological resources.

"Today's decision includes a robust suite of mitigation measures designed to reduce the potential environmental impacts of the project to the greatest extent possible, while still supporting earlier pollution reduction measures, and promoting tribal self-determination and economic development," said Deputy Secretary Connor.

The FCPP, an existing coal-fired electric generating station, that receives coal solely from the Navajo Tribal Coal Lease area, is jointly owned by five utilities, and currently generates 1,540 megawatts of energy for regional consumers. In response to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Federal Implementation Plan for the Best Available Retrofit Technology for FCPP, the plant operators shut down three of the five units, and agreed to install selective catalytic reduction devises on the remaining two units. These actions significantly reduce emissions from the FCPP and decrease the amount of air pollutants emitted. The Navajo Nation's Pinabete Permit Area includes previously permitted but undeveloped reserves that would supply coal to the power plant for up to 25 years, based on current projected customer needs. The permittee is the Navajo Transitional Energy Company, a wholly owned limited liability company of the Navajo Nation.

The ROD's supporting Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), prepared by the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE), analyzes the project's anticipated effects on air emissions, greenhouse gases, water quality and other resources. The EIS was developed in close cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Other Cooperating Agencies include: Interior's Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Park Service; the EPA; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe. The final EIS was published on May 1, 2015.

The project review process included substantial tribal consultation and public outreach. OSMRE also consulted with FWS on impacts to threatened and endangered species and identified reasonable and prudent measures necessary for four species and their habitat. In addition, OSMRE developed programmatic agreements with the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, the proponents, and other federal and state agencies to provide for appropriate mitigation of archaeological and cultural resources that may be encountered with this project.

Public announcements were made in Navajo, Hopi and English in local newspapers and radio stations and a scoping period from July 18, 2012, to November 1, 2012, included nine public meetings in New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. From March 28, 2014 to June 27, 2014, the public comment period on the Draft EIS also included nine public meetings in those states. All meetings had Navajo and Hopi interpreters as needed. OSMRE also considered comments received after publishing the Final EIS on May 1, 2015. The ROD is available here.