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NRC, BLM AND BIA ISSUE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
ON PROPOSED NEW MEXICO MINING PROJECT

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, has issued a draft environmental impact statement on the proposal by Hydro Resources, Inc. to construct and operate the Crownpoint Uranium Solution Mining Project in New Mexico. The NRC is also offering an opportunity for a public hearing on the proposal.

The project would be located near the towns of Church Rock and Crownpoint, in McKinley County northeast of Gallup. It would involve a process known as in-situ leach uranium mining, or solution mining.

In the in-situ mining process, wells are drilled into rock formations containing uranium ore. Water, with added oxygen and sodium bicarbonate, is injected down the wells to mobilize the uranium in the rock so that it is picked up and pumped to the surface, where a processing plant separates the uranium. Known as "yellowcake," the resulting uranium is packaged in drums and transported off-site to processing plants for conversion into fuel for nuclear reactors.

Hydro Resources, which plans to use a complex pattern of injection and recovery wells drilled into the ore zone, would have to conduct its operations in compliance with a license issued by the NRC and minerals operating leases issued for Federal and Indian lands by the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The draft environmental impact statement weighs the environmental, technical and other benefits of the proposed project against the environmental and other costs. It concludes that the appropriate action is to issue the requested license and leases authorizing Hydro Resources to proceed with the project.

Publication of the draft environmental impact statement is one step in the ongoing NRC process to evaluate Hydro Resources' application. After evaluating and considering public comments received on the draft, the NRC staff expects to issue a Final Environmental Impact Statement next Spring. The NRC will also issue a safety evaluation report on technical issues associated with the project. If a public hearing is requested, and held, both the environmental impact statement and the safety evaluation report will be considered in the hearing.

A free copy of the draft environmental impact statement may be obtained by writing to the NRC Publications Section, Attention: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 37082, Washington, DC 20013-7082. A copy is also available for copying at the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, N.W., Washington, DC.

Interested persons are invited to submit written comments by January 7, 1995. The comments should be addressed to the Chief, High-Level Waste and Uranium Recovery Projects Branch, Division of Waste Management, Mail Stop TWFN 7-J9, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555.

Anyone whose interest may be affected by the licensing proceeding may file a request for a hearing within 30 days of publication of a Federal Register notice on this subject on November 14. The request must meet the requirements of the Commission's regulations. Interested persons should follow the formal hearing request procedures described in the Federal Register notice.

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