



UNITED STATES

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

REGION IV

URANIUM RECOVERY FIELD OFFICE
BOX 25325
DENVER, COLORADO 80225

JUL 13 1993

Docket No. 40-8903

Office of Cultural Affairs
ATTN: Thomas Merlan
Villa Rivera #101
228 E. Palace Avenue
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503

Dear Mr. Merlan:

This is in response to a telephone conversation between Mr. Pete Garcia of my staff and you on June 9, 1993. The conversation concerned the future decommissioning of the Homestake Uranium Mill located near Grants, New Mexico. The mill is under NRC license, and the licensee has proposed to decommission the mill. The purpose of this letter is to assure that requirements of 36 CFR 800, and specifically Criteria Consideration G of National Register Bulletin 15 for structures less than 50 years old, are addressed prior to the NRC authorizing demolition of the mill.

The Homestake Uranium Mill was in operation to extract uranium from natural ores from 1958 to 1990. Over this period, the structures have become radiologically contaminated. The contamination exists within the structural components of the buildings as well as in all process equipment. Decontamination of the facility to the extent that unrestricted use or visitation of the site could occur would probably be physically impossible, and would certainly not be economically feasible.

The NRC is required by the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978 to assure adequate closure of all licensed sites, including the tailings and other wastes generated as a result of the processing activities. This includes the mill buildings and associated equipment, unless items can be satisfactorily decontaminated and the licensee desires to do so. When closure activities have been completed in accordance with approved plans which must meet specific technical criteria, the license for the site can be terminated and the responsibility for long-term control of the site assumed by the Department of Energy.

We have evaluated the Homestake Mill against the criterion specified in Consideration G. The criterion states that a property achieving significance within the past 50 years is eligible for inclusion in the National Register if it is of exceptional importance. Our evaluation was based on a review of our docket files and a conversation with the facility manager.

Concerning the criterion specified in Consideration G, we believe that while the Homestake Mill was locally important from an economic standpoint, it was not nationally important as it was only one of a number of uranium mills

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involved in the extraction of uranium. Several of these mills remain in existence, including one in New Mexico. The mill did not utilize any process unique to the uranium extraction industry. Much of the processing equipment used at the mill can be found in other milling industries, such as recovery of gold and vanadium. Therefore, we have concluded that because the Homestake Mill does not represent the sole survivor of the uranium milling era and did not use unique processing methods, it was not of exceptional importance and did not achieve special significance.

We would also note that the NRC maintains a permanent record of the construction specifications, operations, and closure plans for the facility. These files contain all correspondence between the operator and the NRC, as well as license applications and environmental reports. This would provide any individual or organization with ample opportunity to research all facets of the operation of the Homestake Mill.

We trust this provides the information you need to enable you to agree with our conclusion that the Homestake Uranium Mill is not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, and that decommissioning of the facility may proceed. We request that you notify us of the results of your review in a timely manner, as the licensee proposes to complete decommissioning activities this summer.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. Should you have any questions, please contact Mr. Pete Garcia of my staff at (303) 231-5812.

Sincerely,



Ramon E. Hall
Director

cc:

F. Craft, Homestake
B. Garcia, RCPD, NM
E. Montoya, NMED

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bcc:

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