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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DOE CONFIRMS 1991 FUNDING FOR LOWMAN TAILINGS CLEANUP

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) today confirmed that funding is available in the fiscal year 1991 Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action (UMTRA) Project budget to begin site cleanup at the abandoned uranium mill site at Lowman, Idaho, according to DOE Site Manager Paul Mann.

Mann said the construction project is expected to result in a peak employment of about 85 in the summer of 1991. MK-Ferguson Company, a subsidiary of Boise-based Morrison-Knudsen Corporation, is expected to issue a request for proposals (RFP) on behalf of the DOE in January. Contracts are expected to be awarded by mid- to late March. MK-Ferguson is the Remedial Action Contractor on the project, managing the overall cleanup effort and arranging for work to be completed by qualified local subcontractors.

The Lowman site is one of 24 inactive uranium mill tailings sites nationwide being cleaned up by the DOE as part of the UMTRA

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Project. In addition to the mill sites themselves, the DOE, in conjunction with local state or tribal governments, is cleaning up vicinity properties where tailings were used in construction or transported by wind or water erosion.

Tailings are radioactive sands left after the milling operations at Lowman were terminated. They contain radium which releases radon gas as it undergoes radioactive decay. Long-term exposure to elevated concentrations of radon is believed to increase the risk of lung cancer.

At the time the mill was active, the health risk from radon was not known. Consequently, some people used the tailings in construction or landscaping. In addition, some tailings from the uncovered piles blew onto nearby properties.

Vicinity property cleanup near the former Porter Brothers uranium mill began in the summer of 1990 and 23 properties were cleaned up. Contaminated materials from those properties were hauled to the mill site. Eleven additional vicinity properties, including the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department Building in Boise, are slated to be cleaned up in 1991 along with the mill site itself.

The \$8.9 million cost of the remedial action project is being cost-shared with the State of Idaho. The federal government pays 90

percent of the project cost with the state responsible for 10 percent. The DOE is working in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to control costs, Mann said.

When remedial action begins at the site in the summer of 1991, approximately 68,000 cubic meters (88,750 cubic yards) of radioactive sands on the site will be consolidated into a single pile along with 21,700 cubic meters (28,400 cubic yards) of contaminated material from the vicinity properties. The entire pile will be stabilized with an earth and rock cover designed to prevent the escape of radon and resist erosion.

Mann said that the support of Governor Cecil D. Andrus, the Idaho congressional delegation and the Idaho Legislature have been major elements in the continued progress of the project.

The UMTRA Project is a key component of Secretary of Energy James D. Watkins' Environmental Restoration and Waste Management Five-Year Plan for cleanup of nuclear-related sites across the country. The project applies engineering and technical know-how to the protection of the environment and public health, Mann said.

To date, remedial action has been completed on nine UMTRA Project sites: Canonsburg, Pennsylvania; Shiprock, New Mexico; Salt Lake

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City and Green River, Utah; Lakeview, Oregon; Tuba City, Arizona; Riverton and Spook, Wyoming, and Durango, Colorado.

The DOE has established a toll-free number for persons desiring additional information about the Lowman tailings cleanup or the UMTRA Project in general. The DOE can be reached by calling 1-800-523-6495 (in New Mexico, call 1-800-423-2539). Please leave your name and telephone number and a project representative will return your call.

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