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EMNRD Mining and Minerals Division Presents 2023 Excellence in Reclamation Awards

SANTA FE, NM – The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department's (EMNRD) Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) is proud to recognize two projects as recipients of its 2023 Excellence in Reclamation Award.

Instituted in 1996, the Excellence in Reclamation Award recognizes excellence and innovation in coal, hard rock and aggregate mine reclamation and abandoned mine land reclamation projects. The awards also aim to raise public awareness of mining issues through outreach projects conducted around the state. EMNRD presents the awards at the annual New Mexico Mining Association Convention, which this year took place August 24-26 at the Sandia Resort and Casino in Albuquerque.

This year, projects by Navajo Transitional Energy Company, LLC (NTEC) and the collaborative effort of Chevron Incorporated, Trihydro Corporation and KC&MC Services LLC both earned Excellence in Reclamation Awards.

"This year, the Mining and Minerals Division received several exceptional nominations for the 2023 Excellence in Reclamation Awards, so we chose to present two winners," said MMD Director Albert Chang. "We commend the Navajo Transitional Energy Company as well as the cooperative efforts of Chevron Mining Incorporated, Trihydro Corporation, and KC&MC Services LLC for their innovative projects."

This is the fourth Excellence in Reclamation Award for NTEC, which this time was recognized for its Yazzie Wildlife Bluff project. This project was located in the area around the Navajo Mine, which is the sole supplier of fuel to the adjacent 1,540-megawatt Four Corners Power Plant in northwestern New Mexico. The mine, which sits on the Navajo Nation, began operations in 1964, with NTEC taking ownership in 2013.

The Yazzie Wildlife Bluff was originally known as the Yazzie Pit, an area that was mined from the 1970s to 2010. Reclaiming this area included successfully mitigating a golden eagle habitat while remediating lands that had been an open pit for over a decade. Discovery of the eagle nest caused NTEC to alter its initial plans for reclaiming the area.

“We really enjoyed the reclamation effort at Yazzie Pit,” said NTEC Reclamation Engineer Dacia Jacquez. “It was phenomenal to see the land transformed and the golden eagle settling into the environment. As soon as we spotted the eagle, we were dedicated to ensuring its health and safety in its new habitat.”

“We take great pride in our reclamation efforts at Yazzie Wildlife Bluff and at all NTEC locations,” added NTEC Engineering Manager Shawn Smith. “We believe in doing the right thing and going the extra mile to protect the land, the water, the air, and living things. This project exemplifies that commitment in partnership and effect. We are thankful for the collaboration of all the agencies involved and are thrilled with the return of the sacred golden eagle.”

Chevron, Trihydro and KC&MC Services received an Excellence in Reclamation Award for their project The Monument Channel with Pharoah Steps at the York Canyon Underground Mine near Raton, New Mexico.

The Monument York Canyon Underground Mine is a drainage channel that was heavily eroded by refuse from mining activity. The project stakeholders launched a complete redesign and construction effort in late 2015.

Ultimately, separate designs were developed for the upper and lower sections of the channel, with the upper section design incorporating large flat boulders, which were readily available in the area, to create a stair-stepped channel from the bottom down to the stable rock shelf. This feature later became known as the "Pharoah Steps.”

The Monument Channel has been tested several times throughout the past seven years. The York Canyon Complex has experienced multiple heavy monsoon seasons in that time frame, as well as a 100-year, 6-hour event that hit the site in May 2021. The channel sustained no damage from this storm event and continues to be stable.

“We are very excited to receive the 2023 Excellence in Reclamation Award,” said Trihydro Corporation Project Manager Tyrel Hulet. “The success of the Monument Channel/Pharoah Steps Project was due to the collaborative efforts of the New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division, Vermejo Park Ranch, Chevron, Trihydro Corporation, and KC&MC Services LLC.

“This project is another example of the value of industry, agencies, and stakeholders working together in mine reclamation.”

Full details on the award-winning projects are available on the [Mining and Minerals Division’s website](#).

MMD warns citizens to please be aware that abandoned mine features contain nothing of value, are extremely unstable, and pose serious danger, even death, to those who disturb them or enter hazardous openings. The best practice is to Stay Out and Stay Alive.

Information on award winners is posted on MMD’s website.

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Members of the Navajo Transitional Energy Corp., project team, left to right, Josh Johns, Trevor Harvey, Dacia Jacquez, Shawn Smith and Dragan Bogunovic received the 2023 Excellence Reclamation Award from EMRND Deputy Secretary Todd Leahy, far right.