



U.S. Office of Surface Mining

# News Release



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## **UPDATE: Black Mesa Project EIS Underway**

(Denver) - An environmental impact study (EIS) is underway to assess the impact of the Kayenta and Black Mesa coal mines and related projects on the Hopi and Navajo Reservations and northern Arizona.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) is the lead Federal agency to complete the EIS. These studies will analyze the effects of Peabody Western Coal Company's (Peabody) proposed operation and reclamation plans for the Kayenta and Black Mesa coal mines. Studies will also examine several related projects including a coal-slurry preparation plant, reconstruction of a coal-slurry pipeline, and water-supply wells and pipeline. The EIS will help OSM make a decision about whether to approve Peabody's application to continue mining operations at the two mines.

In January and February OSM held public scoping meetings in northern Arizona to explain the project, receive comments, and listen to people's concerns. Meetings were held on the Hopi and Navajo Reservations and in Kingman, Laughlin and Flagstaff. More than 4,500 comments were received.

Many public comments were about water supply and quantity, natural and cultural resources, social and economic conditions, public health and safety, and project alternatives. The Black Mesa Project Scoping Summary Report can be viewed at the project web site: [www.wrcc.osmre.gov/bmk-eis](http://www.wrcc.osmre.gov/bmk-eis).

These issues and concerns expressed during the scoping process help OSM focus the studies, for which information about the natural, human, and cultural environment is now being gathered. Field surveys are being conducted to inventory the cultural and biological resources in the project area, as well as land uses. In response to concerns about the use of water from the Navajo aquifer for coal transport, the Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Geological Survey have drilled exploration and test wells in an area near Leupp proposed for a well field to draw water from the Coconino Aquifer. The Coconino Aquifer is being investigated as an alternative to the Navajo Aquifer, which is the source of water currently used in the coal-slurry pipeline and at the mines. These studies will help OSM better understand the geologic and water quality conditions. A technical advisory group is overseeing development of models to help assess the current amount

of water in the aquifer as well as potential effects of withdrawals by the Black Mesa Project. USGS intends to publish a report on the well testing and groundwater modeling efforts by the end of December 2005.

EIS studies will continue through the next several months. A draft EIS should be available to the public in Spring 2006. During a 60-day review period, OSM will conduct public hearings in northern Arizona to receive comments on the draft EIS. All comments will be reviewed and addressed in a final EIS, planned for release in late 2006.

At the same time, discussions are continuing among the owners of the Mohave Generating Station, Peabody, the Hopi Tribe, and the Navajo Nation regarding the coal- and water-related agreements required for the project.

The Kayenta and Black Mesa surface coal mines have operated since 1970 and 1973, respectively. Peabody operates the mines on three leaseholds comprising about 65,000 acres within the boundaries of the Hopi and Navajo Reservations.

The Kayenta Mine produces about 8.5 million tons of coal per year, all of which is delivered to the Navajo Generating Station near Page, Arizona, by electric railroad. Currently, the Kayenta Mine will provide coal to the Navajo Generating Station through 2011.

The Black Mesa Mine Mine produces 4.8 million tons of coal annually, all of which are delivered to the Mohave Generating Station at Laughlin, Nevada, through the 273-mile long coal-slurry pipeline originating at the Black Mesa Mine coal-slurry preparation plant. Currently, the Black Mesa Mine will provide coal to the Mohave Generating Station through 2005.

For more detailed information concerning the project, OSM invites the reader to visit the following web site address: [www.wrcc.osmre.gov/bmk-eis](http://www.wrcc.osmre.gov/bmk-eis).

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