



Palumbo, David <dpalumbo@usbr.gov>

## Activists seek seat at table on NGS

1 message

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Here's the article per our discussion. See you Thursday at 10:45 or 11 whichever is better for Mr. Cason. Safe travels.

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[http://azdailysun.com/news/local/native-groups-weigh-in-on-coal-plant-s-future/article\\_c2a4a63c-092f-5f80-8f0d-ebb19bacfd39.html](http://azdailysun.com/news/local/native-groups-weigh-in-on-coal-plant-s-future/article_c2a4a63c-092f-5f80-8f0d-ebb19bacfd39.html)

## Native groups weigh in on coal plant's future

Bureau of Reclamation officials promised a more concerted effort to include tribal groups in planning for the future of the Navajo Generating Station during a meeting Thursday in Flagstaff.

The gathering was organized after Navajo and Hopi environmental organizations publicly criticized the federal agency two weeks ago for failing to include them in an initial stakeholder discussion about the coal-fired power plant near Page.

The plant is slated to close at the end of 2019 unless another entity steps up to take over operations. The Bureau of Reclamation agreed to consider that option and held a March 1 meeting to review options for the facility that included only those connected to it contractually.

The letter from the Navajo and Hopi groups pressing for a seat at the table was a reminder about the need to include indigenous nongovernmental organizations in the decision-making process as well, said David Palumbo, the agency's deputy commissioner for operations.

He said the bureau is working on parallel plans, one for continued operations at the power plant and another for plant closure in 2019 that considers a shift to renewable energy development in the region and the repurposing of power plant infrastructure.

While certain parties, including the Navajo Nation and Peabody Energy, operator of the coal mine that supplies the power plant, want to keep the coal-fired plant open, Palumbo reiterated that the economics of low natural gas prices make that “extremely challenging.”

"We're not aware of anybody interested in coming in and paying for the operations (past 2019)," he said.

In Thursday's meeting the tribal activists came out strongly against any continuation in the coal plant's operations beyond 2019 and said they want to see the federal government facilitate renewable energy development instead.

"I would like to see the Bureau of Reclamation really help the Navajo Nation and put your persuasive people out in front the way you did with the resolution that sold NGS to the Navajo Nation and sell them solar or wind. We need your help," said Nicole Horseherder of To'Nizhoni Ani, a group focused on environmental protection in the Black Mesa area.

Another theme among participants was concern about the years of groundwater and surface water used by the mine and power plant. They said they want to see them replaced with less water intensive uses.

"We want them to give the water back to us," said Percy Deal with Dine Citizens Against Ruining our Environment.<sup>Advertisement</sup>

It is actually the State of Arizona that holds the right to the 26,000 to 29,000 acre-feet of Colorado River water used by the Navajo Generating Station annually. As for the coal mine, its groundwater usage has diminished significantly since coal slurry pipeline operations ceased in 2005. It now pumps between 1,200 and 1,600 acre-feet of groundwater per year compared to 2,500 to 3,100 acre-feet per year that is withdrawn for community use in 27 tribal centers in the area, according to a Bureau of Reclamation analysis.

In response to comments from the tribal groups, Palumbo said the Bureau of Reclamation is already working on a plan for transitioning from the Navajo Generating Station to cleaner energy options.

Discussions about plant closure also have included the possibility of repurposing some of the facility's infrastructure to benefit the Navajo and Hopi tribes, Palumbo said.

The giant pumps that transport water from Lake Powell to the power plant could instead be used for distributing residential water while water and wastewater treatment facilities could be repurposed for local communities, he said.

Massive power lines that extend out from the plant could instead carry electricity from solar, wind or natural gas projects, he said.

Palumbo said he also sees the NGS closure as an opportunity to revive water settlement discussions between the Hopi and Navajo tribes, the state of Arizona and the federal government. It could start with the fact that the thousands of acre feet of water that were going to the power plant will be freed up, he said.

"(The state of Arizona's) perspective on the need for that water might change without an NGS in the equation," Palumbo said.

As they took turns speaking during the four-hour meeting, the seven tribal participants thanked the Bureau of Reclamation for responding to their request for a seat at the NGS discussion table

"I think this is the first time I've seen a government agency, instead of just doing a government-to-government relationship with the presidents and chairmen of tribes, you are talking with us directly...I want to thank you for that very much," said Vernon Masayesva, executive director of the Black Mesa Trust and a former chairman of the Hopi Tribe.

Participants also made it clear that they wanted to be included in future discussions.

"I'm hoping this isn't the involvement you're thinking is going to be enough for us, my answer is no it won't be," Deal said. "Whatever decommission is going to be applied is going to affect us because we are the land user, we are the occupier...those powerful people don't understand the connection we have with our land out there."

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