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The Environment Department's mission is to protect and restore the environment and to foster a healthy and prosperous New Mexico for present and future generations.

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Agreement marks first major step toward remediating legacy uranium mining contamination at San Mateo Creek Basin

SANTA FE — Following nearly 18 months of negotiations under unwavering pressure from the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reached an agreement with three mining companies to characterize groundwater impacts and investigate possible remedies within the Central Study Area of the San Mateo Creek Basin.

The EPA entered into an Administrative Order on Consent with the Respondents (Homestake Mining Company of California, United Nuclear Corporation and Rio Algom Mining, LLC), which conducted significant uranium mining operations in the area. The Order requires the Respondents to characterize groundwater contamination, assess possible risks to human health and the environment and evaluate clean-up options pursuant to an enforceable timeline.

“One of the New Mexico Environment Department’s top priorities is making meaningful progress on languishing legacy contamination sites,” said NMED Cabinet Secretary James Kenney. “Under my tenure, the Environment Department will aggressively push for accelerated remediation while standing firm against any new contamination. New Mexicans expect and deserve nothing less.”

The agreement demonstrates how federal and state agencies can work toward creative solutions that significantly advance environmental remediation and protection. While the signing of this Order marks an important milestone, NMED will continue to collaborate with the parties to ensure successful implementation.

The San Mateo Creek Basin, which lies within the Grants Uranium Mineral Belt, was subject to extensive uranium mining and milling in the 1950s through the 1990s. Surface and groundwater were contaminated by these activities. The remedial investigation and feasibility study for the Central Study Area are part of a larger, comprehensive effort to address legacy uranium mining impacts to the environment and communities of the San Mateo Creek Basin.

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