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Contacts:

Shiloh Hernandez, Western Environmental Law Center, 406-204-4861, hernandez@westernlaw.org
Mike Eisenfeld, San Juan Citizens Alliance, 505-360-8994, mike@sanjuancitizens.org
Carol Davis, Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, 928-221-7859, caroljdavis.2004@gmail.com
Taylor McKinnon, Center for Biological Diversity, 801-300-2414, tmckinnon@biologicaldiversity.org
Rachel Conn, Amigos Bravos, 575-770-8327, rconn@amigosbravos.org
Marta Stoepker, Sierra Club, 313- 977- 0054, marta.stoepker@sierraclub.org

**As Coal Collapses, Groups Launch Lawsuit Challenging 25-year Extension of
Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine**
Suit Seeks Renewable Energy Transition Alternatives

PHOENIX – Amid crumbling coal economics and surging renewable energy growth, Navajo, regional and national conservation groups filed suit today in Arizona’s federal district court challenging the U.S. government’s 25-year extension of coal operations at Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine. The approval, which allows coal mining and combustion through 2041, lacked any assessment of clean energy alternatives.

The lawsuit comes as the world’s largest mining company, Peabody Coal, joins Arch, Alpha, Patriot and other U.S. coal companies in bankruptcy; as industry efforts to export more U.S. coal to Asia hit market and community roadblocks; and as investments in renewables rapidly outpace fossil fuels. Meanwhile, Navajo Nation has taken over ownership and liabilities of Navajo Mine from departing BHP Billiton and is preparing to buy El Paso Electric’s share of Four Corners Power Plant in a deal to be brokered by majority owner Arizona Public Service.

“Four Corners region coal has enabled far-off places like Phoenix and Southern California to thrive, so now that coal is on a permanent decline we deserve real attention to how our region can diversify going forward,” said Mike Eisenfeld with San Juan Citizens Alliance in Farmington, New Mexico. “Given the energy landscape today, it’s a serious disservice for government leaders to just tell the Four Corners to stick with collapsing coal without even a look at alternatives.”

The lawsuit is in response to the Department of the Interior preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement that was finalized in May of 2015 that violates the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), failing to adequately analyze impacts to air, water, land, people, and endangered fish. Despite being in a unique position to address responsible transition from the 54-year legacy of the Four Corners Power Plant/Navajo Mine complex, the Department of the Interior chose not to take a hard look at a reasonable range of alternatives. The lawsuit challenges the Record of Decision under NEPA and the Endangered Species Act for 25 more years of the operation of the complex.

“The Four Corners mine-to-mouth coal complex represents a prime example of an energy operation that cannot operate without harming the surrounding people and environment,” said Shiloh Hernandez, attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center. “That the U.S. Department of the Interior has largely swept these dangers aside is a health and environmental injustice, and its deafening silence on transition options is an economic injustice.”

“Our Navajo Nation president [recently declared](#) ‘We can’t depend on our coal, oil and gas revenues anymore,’” said Carol Davis of Diné CARE. “The rapid decline of global coal economics necessitates a hard look at solution-oriented growth for the Navajo Nation and Navajo communities, with reparations for over 50 years of undervalued resource flow off our lands. Approving 25 more years of

coal mining and burning at the Navajo Mine and Four Corners Power Plant blindly assumes profitable operations when in reality they are suspect at best, and places the Navajo Nation at great economic risk with the cost of owning and operating Navajo Mine with full responsibility for eventual reclamation.”

“The same coal pollution that makes people sick is driving endangered fish toward extinction in San Juan River,” said Taylor McKinnon with the Center for Biological Diversity. “Now is the time to begin transitioning to clean, renewable energy.”

“Mercury is the most common pollution problem in lakes and reservoirs in the region, and mercury is in coal pollution,” said Rachel Conn with Amigos Bravos. “In New Mexico alone, mercury causes impairment of 60,000 acres of lakes and reservoirs in the state, which is more than double the area impaired by any other pollution source.”

"The energy market is changing fast and long-term commitments to coal will prove to be costly mistakes," said Bill Corcoran, Western Director of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign. "The Department of the Interior should support a planned transition from coal to instead of rubber-stamping another 25 years of toxic pollution that harms people and wildlife. Doubling down on coal flies in the face of accelerating climate disruption and the extreme risks it brings to people and the environment that sustains communities."

Attorneys from the Western Environmental Law Center, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Barth Law Office represent Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Amigos Bravos, and the Sierra Club for this case.

A copy of the complaint is available [here](#).

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