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Coal Mine Records Made Accessible

By [Carol Berry](#) February 13, 2011[RSS](#)

Carol Berry

Black Mesa coal mine

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DENVER—A controversial coal permit is open to public scrutiny after months of effort by American Indian and environmental groups concerned about a giant strip mine atop Black Mesa in northern Arizona.

A settlement in Colorado District Court between the groups and the Western Region Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) allows the public release of documents held by Peabody Western Coal Co., including the current permit for Peabody mining, according to a statement from a coalition of Indian and environmental groups.

“For over 40 years, Peabody’s coal mining operations have continued to change the cultural and physical landscape of Black Mesa,” said Wahleah Johns, Black Mesa Water Coalition, in the statement. “As Navajo citizens, we have every right to ask them to disclose their operating permits.”

Last year a Department of the Interior administrative law judge vacated an OSM-issued life-of-mine permit that would have allowed Peabody to expand its permit area on Black Mesa, where more than 5,000 acres of coal lie untouched.

OSM was sued for the records’ release after repeated requests under the Freedom of Information Act. They show Peabody’s mining reclamation plans, including a large impoundment and details about protecting wildlife and sacred lands, the groups said.

In addition to Black Mesa Water Coalition, groups filing for the records’ release were Dine’ Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, To Nizhoni Ani (“Beautiful Water Speaks”), Sierra Club, and Center for Biological Diversity, working through the Energy Minerals Law Center.

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Wednesday, February 16, 2011

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