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Contact: Aimee Erickson, Citizens Coal Council ph: 724-470-3982

Citizens in Coal-Impacted Communities Oppose U.S. Interior Agency Shuffling Interior Secretary Salazar's plan illegally buries coal mining agency

Citizen input sought by Dept. of the Interior at nationwide meetings, Jan. 17-31

(Bridgeville, PA) -- National, regional, and local citizen organizations are condemning the proposed merger of the federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as ordered in October 2011 by Secretary of the Interior Kenneth Salazar. The groups denounce the order as illegal and an unconstitutional violation of the power and authority reserved to Congress.

Aimee Erickson, Executive Director of the national Citizens Coal Council, stated:

“While the OSM is charged with regulating and controlling coal mining, the BLM actually promotes coal mining on a massive scale. That is an inescapable conflict that prevents “consolidation” which is purposefully and expressly forbidden by the federal 1977 Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA). Secretary Salazar should instead embrace his responsibility in accordance with Congress’s creation of SMCRA to protect coal-impacted citizens and their environment, and he should provide the full funding necessary for OSM to perform its duties in oversight of the coal industry.”

The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) was passed in 1977. Its major purpose is to ensure that mining is conducted in a way that protects both public health and the environment, and mandates that land be reclaimed after mining is complete. The OSM, a regulatory agency, was created to enforce SMCRA and regulate coal mining on both public and private lands in the United States. The BLM, formed in 1946, is responsible for leasing much of the coal on federal public lands. Those leases generate funds for the federal government.

“Congress carefully designed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act to ensure the OSM would act as an independent entity within the Department of Interior under the direct supervision of the Secretary,” explained Richard Stout, board member of Citizens Organizing Project in Knox County, Illinois. Vernon Masayesva of the Black Mesa Trust in Arizona, added that, “the Secretary’s attempt to bury the OSM inside the BLM dishonors the letter and spirit of SMCRA, undercuts the Secretary’s Trust obligation to Native Americans, and his order should be withdrawn.”

On January 6, 2012, Interior announced a series of meetings this month to seek input from citizens and stakeholders regarding the proposed merger. Outreach meetings are planned in the following cities: St. Louis, MO (1/17); Washington, PA (1/18); Charleston, WV (1/19); Knoxville, TN (1/20); Billings, MT (1/23); Denver, CO (1/24); Flagstaff, AZ (1/25); Window Rock, AZ (1/26); Washington, D.C. (1/30), and Lexington, KY (1/31). See <http://www.doi.gov/bureaus/blm-osm/index.cfm>

Citizens are encouraged to provide comments at the meetings. Information from the Department of Interior can be found at: [About OSM-BLM Consolidation](#) . Additional info and press resources are available on the Citizens Coal Council blog at www.osmrewatch.com. See especially the U.S. Senate testimony of law professor Patrick McGinley on the unconstitutionality of Secretary Salazar’s merger order.

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