

# Navajo Generating Station's owners weigh options

PHOENIX - The owners a massive coal-fired power plant in northern Arizona are considering options that include keeping it open but also closing it within the next few years, a spokesman for the plant's operator said today.

Salt River Project spokesman Scott Harelson said officials of the power district recently met with Navajo Nation officials to discuss the Navajo Generating Station located on the reservation near Page.

The plant's lease with the Navajo Nation expires Dec. 31, 2019, but the plant could be closed well before then if its owners take that course, Harelson said.

A Navajo environmental advocacy group, Dine Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, accused SRP of talking about possibly closing the plant as early as 2017 to extract lease concessions from the Navajo Nation.

"We are concerned that SRP's sudden move to talk about full closure of NGS as early as this year may be a scare tactic by the plant owners to intimidate (the) Navajo Nation and extract financial concessions from Navajo officials. If any such bluff or blackmail is indeed taking place, it needs to be called out and rejected," the group said in a statement.

Harelson said the group's characterization of SRP's recent talks with Navajo Nation officials were "absolutely incorrect."

SRP's decisions with the Navajo Nation and other entities "are just an attempt to keep those entities aware of circumstances of the plant at this time," Harelson said. "The reality is the economics of coal generating (are) changing rapidly. That is what is driving this latest analysis and potential scenario for the plant."

The owners hope to decide the plant's future "by spring," Harelson said.

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**Salt River  
Project  
spokesman  
Scott  
Harelson**

The plant employs 500 people, mostly Navajo, and is considered important to the local economy. A Peabody Energy coal mine that supplies the plant employs 430 people.

The federal Environmental Protection Administration announced in 2014 that the plant could either shut down one of its three 750-megawatt units or reduce power generation by an equal amount by 2020 to cut haze-causing emissions of nitrogen at places like the Grand Canyon. Additional emission control equipment would be needed by 2030 on the two remaining units.

Dine CARE is among several groups who went to court to challenge the EPA's decisions, which gave the plant's owners more time to implement pollution controls and cuts emissions beyond the agency's original proposal.

The plant's owners, besides SRP, are the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Arizona Public Service Co., Tucson Electric Power and Nevada-based NV Energy. The bureau uses electricity from the plant to power the Central Arizona Project canal system that delivers Colorado River water to Phoenix and Tucson.

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