

UMTRA project may take until 2034 to finish, county liaison says

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The Times-Independent

05.05.16 - 09:23 am

Although the first half of the tailings from the Moab Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action Project (UMTRA) have been successfully transported over the past seven years, it may take as long as 18 more years for the project to be completed.

An estimated project completion date of 2034 was given by Lee Shenton, Grand County's UMTRA liaison, during his presentation to the Grand County Council at its regular meeting on Tuesday, May 3.

Shenton said that approximately 51 percent of the tailings, or about 8.1 million of the 16 million tons of material, has already been shipped to the disposal site located about 30 miles north of Moab, near Crescent Junction. The material is being removed from the former Atlas uranium ore processing site located on the west bank of the Colorado River about three miles north of Moab.

Shenton said that the project will see a 10 percent reduction in funding in fiscal year 2017, with an estimated appropriation of \$34.7 million, down from \$38.6 million in fiscal year 2016. The project is administered by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), with funding being approved and allocated each year by the U.S. Congress.

In connection with recent budget cuts, approximately 25 percent of the workers at the site were laid off at the end of April, Shenton noted. DOE officials expect the reduction in workforce to last at least until the end of 2017.

Currently, about 40,000 tons per month are being moved in two train shipments per week, Shenton said.

On April 20, the DOE announced that it had awarded a new five-year contract to Portage Inc., the current contractor for the UMTRA project. The contract was renewed in the form of a "follow-on task order" essentially extending the current contract, which was scheduled to end Sept. 30. The new contract, which begins Oct. 1, provides \$153.8 million in funding spread over a five-year period, according to a news release from the DOE.

The tailings pile removal began in April of 2009, and by the following year shipments had reached 200,000 tons per month and higher, thanks to \$108 million in federal stimulus money received as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. That infusion of funding significantly boosted the project's production for more than a year. With the stimulus funds now gone, the base funding remains, although it varies from year to year according to the appropriations made in the federal budget, Shenton said.

In addition to the removal of the tailings, work is being done on groundwater and vicinity property remediation, along with reclamation work on the site and the expansion of the disposal cell site, Shenton said.

Shenton also updated the council about the project's radon, gamma radiation, and airborne particulate levels, noting that the measurements fall well within acceptable safety limits.