

**Black Mesa Water Coalition \* Dine CARE \* To' Nizhoni  
Ani \* Center for Biological Diversity \* Sierra Club**

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## **New Report: Black Mesa Coal Mining Draining Region's Water Supply**

Flagstaff, AZ— A massive coal-mining facility on Black Mesa has a much more damaging effect to a vital local water supply, according to a new report released today. A hydrology study, prepared by Dr. Daniel Higgins (PhD in Arid Lands Resource Sciences from the University of Arizona) demonstrates that after four decades of coal mine groundwater withdrawals, mine-related impacts to the Navajo Aquifer (N-aquifer) far exceed those that have been acknowledged or recognized by the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), the lead Regulatory Authority for Peabody Coal's massive mining facility on Black Mesa. The N-aquifer is an important source of water below Black Mesa that feeds sacred springs and is used by thousands as drinking water.

"Despite what these models predicted years ago, I think any reasonable person who looks at the data would conclude that the rates of water level decline at Kayenta and spring discharge decline at Moenkopi are directly related to Peabody's groundwater withdrawals," said Higgins, who studies the interactions of complex social-ecological systems and spent more than five years investigating Black Mesa's groundwater development – the focus of his dissertation research.

"This report reaffirms the fact that coal industry continues to materially damage our aquifer with impunity," said Marshall Johnson of the Navajo grassroots organization, To' Nizhoni Ani, or *Beautiful Water Speaks*. "The truth is that Peabody has yet to prove that the mine is not damaging the aquifer and OSM has yet to hold Peabody accountable. Instead of addressing the health of the aquifer, OSM works on creating new standards each time that have been exceeded so for us, it's disappointing watching a federal agency deliberately sidestep its responsibilities."

Wahleah Johns of the Black Mesa Water Coalition said, "OSM should not award Peabody a permit renewal until a thorough investigation is conducted on the findings of this report on the N-Aquifer."

"Dr. Higgins' report comes at a critical time while OSM is preparing an Environmental Assessment to analyze the impacts of the Kayenta Mine. OSM officials now need to address and respond to this report before they let Peabody off the hook for damage to the Navajo aquifer," said Nicole Horseherder of To' Nizhoni Ani and a Black Mesa resident where she depends on the N-Aquifer for her home and ranch. "The Obama Administration needs to restore environmental justice for local communities and hold Peabody accountable for damaging that most basic human right—the right to drink in perpetuity pure, clean water."

"We have known for a long time that water withdrawals have been impacting local springs and wildlife but this report puts the burden on OSM to demonstrate to local communities why mine operations should be allowed to continue," said Taylor McKinnon of the Center for Biological Diversity.

Higgins' report was submitted by the OSM by Black Mesa Water Coalition, Dine CARE, To'

Nizhoni Ani, the Center for Biological Diversity and Sierra Club as a supplement to comments previously submitted to the agency in 2010. OSM is preparing an Environmental Assessment that will be available for public review in August of 2011. The groups have asked OSM to hold a meeting within the next 30 days to discuss the report's findings.

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