NEWS RELEASE
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TAKE PRIDE IN UTAH HIGHLIGHTS ONE OF GOVERNOR'S TOP 25 WATERSHEDS WITH A CLEANUP PROJECT IN SAN JUAN COUNTY

A Utah watershed cleanup project, one of three pilot projects in the nation, will be highlighted during Take Pride in Utah activities on Saturday, April 17, 2004. Utah Department of Natural Resources Executive Director Bob Morgan will join local volunteers at Cottonwood Wash watershed about 10 miles west of Blanding in San Juan County. They will plant seedlings in a continuing effort to restore watershed and close dangerous abandoned mines in a historic uranium mining district.

"Governor Walker has made watershed improvements one of the key initiatives of her administration because they provide many of the basic needs of life itself," notes Morgan. "The Cottonwood Wash is one of the top 25 watersheds targeted as part of the Governor's Watershed Initiative."

The Cottonwood Wash project is one of three pilot watershed cleanup projects in the nation using Clean Water Act funds. It is the largest cooperative effort in the state. The Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining's Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program is providing design engineering and project management and collaborating with the Department of Environmental Quality Division of Water Quality, the Bureau of Land Management, and the USDA Manti LaSal National Forest to address physical hazards and environmental problems posed by abandoned uranium mines in the watershed.

The Cottonwood Wash area was mined extensively for uranium from the early 1930s through 1960. The project area includes some 200 mine openings and their associated waste piles, pits, drill holes and roads. Some of the mines are located directly on the flood plain of the creek and high water percolates through waste piles.

The Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program is funded primarily from grants from the Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining, whose role is to ensure coal mining practices leave the environment in good shape during and after mining. Coal mine operators pay a tax of 35 cents per ton of surface mined coal and 15 cents per ton of underground mined coal. OSM returns this money to the states for reclamation of abandoned coal and hard rock mines.

However, at hard rock mines the money may only be used to mitigate physical safety hazards. The environmental problems posed by these mines must be addressed with other funds. The Cottonwood Wash project is a prime example of a cooperative agreement that provides a funding source that allows the state to address environmental problems at hard rock mining sites.