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STATE AGENCIES SIGN AGREEMENT TO MANAGE BATS IN ABANDONED URANIUM MINES

(Salt Lake City) - A new cooperative effort is designed to protect humans and bats. Contrary to their much-maligned image, bats play a critical role in ecology as pollinators and major biological controllers of nighttime flying insects. For example, a single little brown bat can catch 600 mosquitoes an hour. But, as encroaching human development continues to destroy natural bat habitat, the flying mammals often turn to the man-made habitats of abandoned mines.

The Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining's Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program (AMRP) and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources have penned an agreement that will protect bat habitat and protect humans from entering abandoned mines. AMRP is charged with safeguarding dangerous abandoned mine sites in Utah, but closure or alteration of abandoned mines may adversely impact bats and bat populations. To ensure abandoned uranium mines can be closed safely for both people and bats, the AMRP has agreed to implement specific procedures in conjunction with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

"Wildlife Resources has the responsibility for management of bats in Utah, but they agree that it's highly unlikely that bats will find old uranium mines attractive habitat," said Luci Malin, administrator of the Abandoned Mine Program. "We've entered into an agreement that should a bat survey confirm a mine is not being used by bats that we may close it using the method we think best protects the public."

While many abandoned mines may be sealed in such a way that the mine becomes permanently inaccessible to people and bats, other designs are "bat-compatible" meaning human entry is prevented but bats have continued access. This method uses grates or bat gates to prevent entry.

"The Division of Wildlife Resources' willingness to provide us this flexibility will enable us to work more efficiently in protecting unwary adventurers from the dangers of an abandoned mine," said Malin.

When it's found that bats are using an abandoned uranium mine the AMRP will consult with wildlife biologists to determine a mutually acceptable bat-compatible closure. Under terms of the agreement the Division of Wildlife Resources continues to be the primary decision-maker regarding bats in Utah.

Additional information regarding Utah's Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program can be found at www.ogm.utah.gov.

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