

**URANIUM MINE CLEANUP IN NEW MEXICO:  
A Story of Legislation Success!**

**Presentation to the  
Interim Indian Affairs Committee**

**July 11, 2022**

**Susan Gordon, Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment  
Teracita Keyanna, Red Water Pond Road Community Association**



# Overview of Presentation

- History of Uranium Legislation
- House Bill 164
- Current status
- Red Water Pond Road Community
- Northeast Church Rock Mine Superfund Site
- Failure of EPA Cleanup Plan
- 43rd Uranium Tailings Spill Legacy Commemoration





# The Economic Opportunities and Challenges of Uranium Mine Cleanup in New Mexico

- NM Legislature approved funding for a uranium study brought forward by Rep Wonda Johnson
- The University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) conducted research during 2019 and 2020
- Developed economic projections of potential revenues and job creation for an injection of \$1 billion into uranium remediation
- Provided a blueprint for the State to leverage existing expertise in environmental remediation and resources for workforce and business development

[bber.unm.edu/uranium](https://bber.unm.edu/uranium)



# Steps on the path - 2021

HB 51 passed that created a web-based information portal that allows public access to state environmental data. [https://nhnm.unm.edu/data/nm\\_ert](https://nhnm.unm.edu/data/nm_ert)

The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Agency created an online Uranium Mines Dashboard

- <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/91f296cb3ea24f689329eb5075ec3bb7>

## **Presentations to key partners:**

- New Mexico Small Business Development Center
- New Mexico Bioscience Authority
- State Land Office - Stephani Garcia Richards
- Natural Resources Trustee - Maggie Hart Stebbins

New Mexico Economic Development Department planned to release its statewide strategy by September 2021. Environmental remediation was not included in the Target Industries.



# Actions during 2021

## Interim Committees

- **Indian Affairs Committee and Rural Economic Opportunities Task Force**

Sent letters to:

Economic Development Department - asking for a Remediation Target Industry

US Environmental Protection Agency - asking for a timeline for uranium cleanup

Los Alamos National Laboratory - asking for information on the cleanup process

- **Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee**

Proposed Committee Legislation to create an Uranium Remediation Office

Legislation introduced during 2022 Regular Session

## Economic Development Department

Released is final Statewide Strategic Plan October 2021

It included brief references to collaboration between academia, industry and national labs and recommended establishing a resource center for environmental remediation in partnership with NM Environment Department.



# 2022 Session

HOUSE BILL 164

**55TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2022**

INTRODUCED BY

Debra M. Sariñana and Anthony Allison and D. Wonda Johnson and

Jeff Steinborn

AN ACT

RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENT; DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENT TO COORDINATE THE STATE'S EFFORTS TO CLEAN UP AND  
RECLAIM FORMER URANIUM MINE AND MILL SITES; PROVIDING DUTIES;  
CREATING THE URANIUM MINING RECLAMATION REVOLVING FUND;  
MAKING AN APPROPRIATION.



# 2022 Success

## **House Energy & Natural Resources Committee**

The HENRC tabled the bill while it was rewritten with input from both NMNR and NMED.

The bill was brought back as a Substitution which passed on a unanimous vote 2/7

## **House Appropriations and Finance Committee.**

It passed unanimously out of committee and was sent to the House Floor. 2/10

## **House Floor**

It passed the Floor with a unanimous vote. 2/12

## **Senate Conservation Committee**

HB164 was heard and passed on a unanimous vote. 2/15

## **Senate Floor**

It was passed on the floor by unanimous vote. 2/17 last day of session

**Governor Lujan Grisham** she signed it on March 1, 2022.



# Current Status

## **New Mexico Environment Department**

2 Positions

Uranium Mine Reclamation Coordinator - Water Resource Professional 4  
Will report to the Secretary

Uranium Position - Water Resource Professional 3  
Located in the Mining & Environmental Compliance area

## **Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources**

1 Position

Uranium Mine Reclamation Coordinator - Water Resource Professional 4  
Located in Mining & Minerals Division



# Red Water Pond Road Community Association





# North East Church Rock Uranium Mine



Photo from EPA

- \* United Nuclear Corporation (UNC) operated NECR from 1967 to 1982.
- \* Extracted approximately 3.5 million tons of ore, making this the second highest producing mine on the Navajo Nation.
- \* NECR is the highest priority mine for cleanup due to its size as well as the location of the adjacent community
- \* Approximately one million cubic yards of contaminated mine waste will be removed from the NECR Mine Site and consolidated primarily at the nearby UNC Mill Site.



# EPA's Cleanup Plan



Photo by Kathy Helms

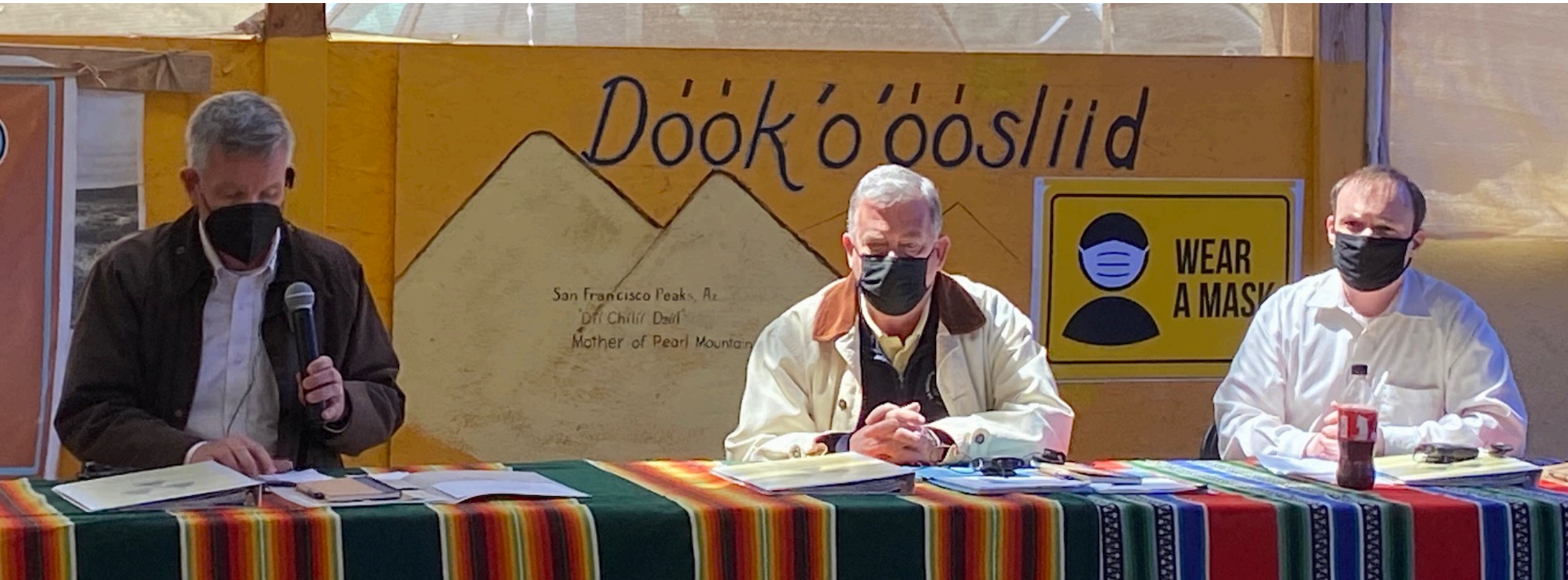
- \* Move 1.4 million tons of contaminated soil to the nearby UNC Mill Site, only one half mile from the community.
- \* Construct a holding cell on top of a uranium mill repository site, located in a flood plain.
- \* The mill repository does not have a lining so will always be leaching.
- \* The Community requested relocation to Black Standing Tree Mesa. Instead, EPA has divided the community by moving families away, often not on Navajo lands, and without clear criteria for housing.



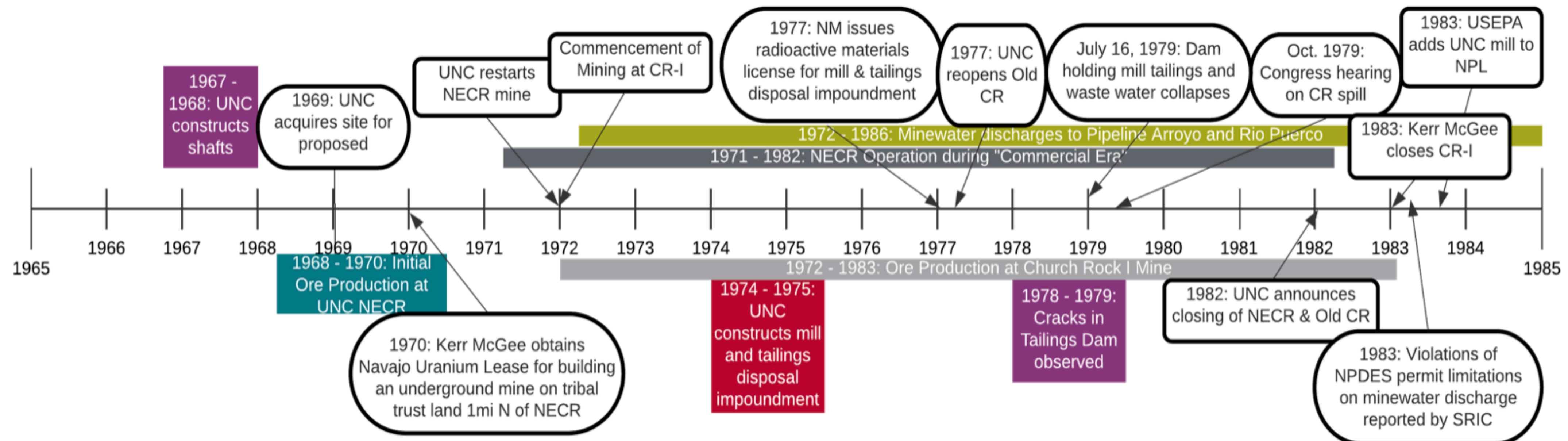
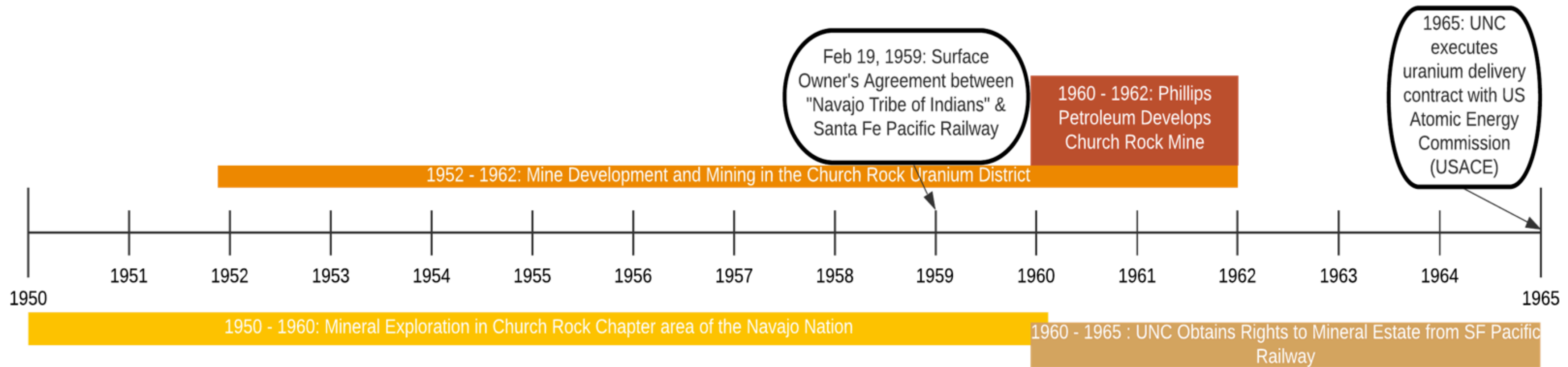
# Community Opposition



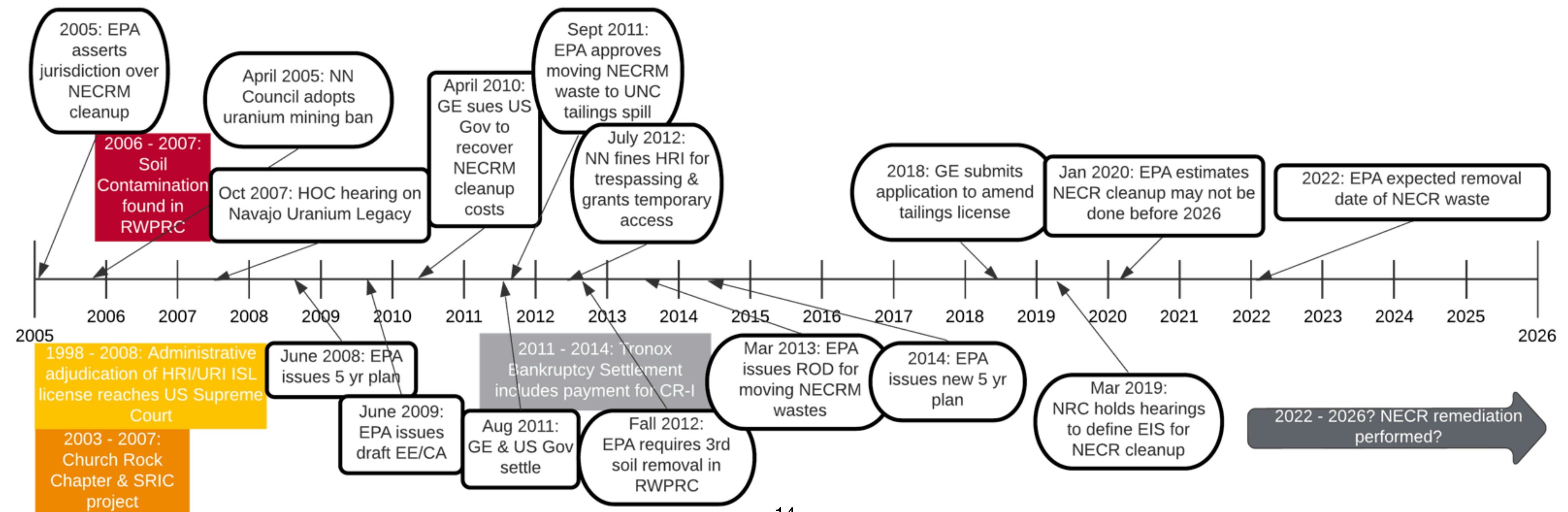
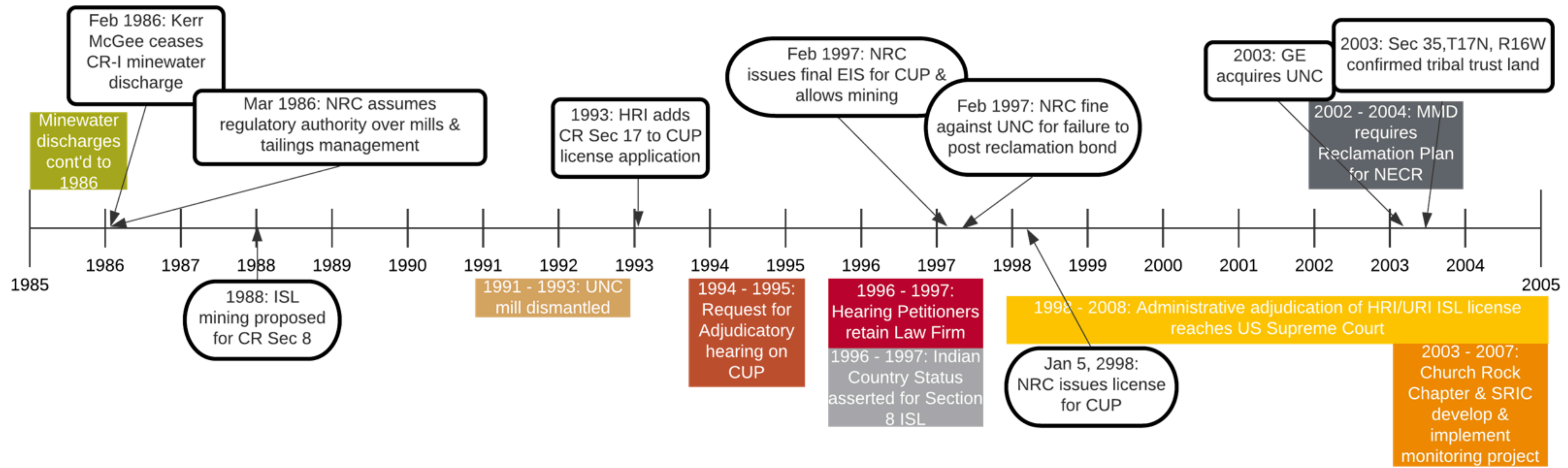
**April 22, 2022**  
**Nuclear Regulatory Commission**  
**Meeting**

















**July 16, 2022**

**42nd Annual Commemoration of the 1979 Uranium Tailings Spill**  
**Remains the largest release of radioactive wastes, by volume, in US history**



Photos courtesy of Scott Kovac and Paul Robinson





## **The 43rd Uranium Tailings Spill Legacy Commemoration**

**Saturday, July 16  
from 7 am to 1 pm**

***12 miles North of Red Rock State Park  
on Highway 566 near Churchrock, NM***

**Red Water Pond Road Community Association**

7 am - Opening Prayers  
8 am - Walk to Spill Site  
9 am - Return to Arbor  
10 am - Sharing  
11:30 am - Lunch  
1 pm - Closing Prayers  
All Day - Silent Auction  
& Educational booths



This historic event is open to all ages and will share the struggles uranium harmed people face in their daily lives, and the healing yet to come for our communities and Mother Earth.

**For more information: 505-577-8438  
[www.swuraniumimpacts.org](http://www.swuraniumimpacts.org)**



# Living with Uranium Wastes for 50 Years and Four Generations







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