

Handing over the keys

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Navajo Nation takes over generating station as SRP departs

LeChee, Ariz. — After nearly 55 years, the land leased by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and five utilities to build the Navajo Generating Station has been returned to the Navajo Nation.

Lemuel Brown, the Salt River Project on-site supervisor of the decommissioning and demolition of NGS since it ceased operation in November 2019, handed the keys to the site to Jason John, director of the Navajo Nation Dept. of Water Resources and chairman of the Navajo Nation Consultation Team that oversaw the decommissioning process, on March 18.

“That pretty much concludes everything we had,” Brown told a small group from SRP, LeChee Chapter, the City of Page, and the Navajo Nation.

With that, the demolition of the 45-year-old power plant is complete, the land reclamation has begun, and the Navajo Nation must now determine what it will do with the remaining assets it chose to retain.

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It was in 2015 that the Navajo Nation Council voted to extend the NGS lease for another 25 years when its original lease would expire in December 2019. But in February 2017, former SRP CEO Mark Bonsall traveled to the power plant to announce to its employees that the remaining five utility participants decided to close it for economic reasons.

Later that year, the Council approved another five-year lease extension so NGS could continue to operate through 2019, SRP could redeploy its employees to jobs at its other facilities, and decommissioning of the plant wouldn't take place until December 2024.

It was on May 27, 1969, that the Navajo Tribal Council voted 46-0 to lease the land to the Bureau, SRP, Arizona Public Service, Tucson Gas & Electric Co., San Diego Gas & Electric Co., Nevada Power Co. and the Department of Water and Power of the City of Los Angeles.

Construction of the three-unit 2,250-megawatt power plant began in April 1970 after the \$650 million contract was awarded to the Bechtel Corporation.

NGS' generating units 1, 2, and 3 went online in 1974, 1975 and 1976.

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