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DEQ and Pioneer Technical Services Receive Engineering Excellence Award

Innovative techniques effectively helped cleanup contaminated site outside of Yellowstone

Helena -- The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Pioneer Technical Services, Inc. this week received an Engineering Excellence Award in the environmental category from the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC). The award was for the successful reclamation of the McLaren Abandoned Mine Site Reclamation project in Cooke City, Montana.

The competition recognizes projects that demonstrate an exceptional degree of innovation, complexity, achievement and value. Pioneer Technical Services provided engineering design and construction oversight work for the project, managed by the DEQ Abandoned Mine Lands program. The project was completed in October 2014 and included two years of investigation and design work and five years of construction work.

The project successfully remediated the McLaren Abandoned Mine Site, turning a previously unusable area back to its historical landscape while cleaning up contamination in Soda Butte Creek and preserving an important fishery and the natural resources of Yellowstone National Park.

“Sound engineering and a great deal of resilience from the project team were required to get this work completed under difficult conditions,” said Tom Henderson, DEQ project manager. “One of the primary challenges was that the majority of the 10-acre tailings impoundment was well below the water table, and this water was highly contaminated by the tailings.”

The challenges and complexity of the project were considered for this award. DEQ and Pioneer addressed shallow groundwater at the site, water-saturated tailings, short construction seasons, limited space, limited repository capacity, and the site being in a remote alpine area.

“There were a lot of issues besides the technical challenges, such as transportation, wildlife, and public interaction,” said Joe McElroy, project manager for Pioneer. “DEQ’s leadership and support in dealing with these issues, and our construction partner Knife River’s planning and commitment to the project helped make it a huge success.”

The project incorporated innovative techniques to dewater the tailings impoundment, allowing safe working conditions during the excavation of the tailings, and in incorporating lime into the tailings ensuring repository stability and that the tailings fit in the designated area. Over one billion pounds of tailings were excavated, stabilized, and placed in the repository, and approximately 100 million gallons of contaminated groundwater were treated during the project.

“Pioneer Technical Services, Inc. is honored to be part of the team recognized by ACEC for work at the McLaren Tailings Reclamation Site,” said Brad Archibald, President/CEO. “For DEQ to have the faith in us to address the challenges at this site means a lot to us, and we are proud of what this team accomplished.”

The McLaren project is now eligible to compete in the environmental category at the national competition. National winners will be announced at the Engineering Excellence Awards in Washington D.C. in April 2015.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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