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NEWS

BNI Coal sets production record at Center Mine

Center, North Dakota—A record-setting year at BNI's Center Mine helped propel total lignite production in North Dakota to a banner year in 2017.

The Center Mine produced more than 4.65 million tons in 2017, topping its previous record of 4.60 million tons in 2002. Together, North Dakota's five mines produced 29.1 million tons of lignite in 2017, which was the highest annual tonnage since 2009.

Wade Boeshans, president and general manager of BNI Energy, said 2017 was a milestone year for BNI on many fronts: sales, profitability, project execution, safety and environmental performance, and costs to customers that were 7 percent below budget.

"These results are a true reflection of our team's commitment to the right results, the right way," Boeshans said. "Our strategy for our mining operations going into the year was to focus on safe, efficient and cost-competitive operations. We knew that we had to effectively execute this strategy while living our values to bend our cost curve and position our customers to compete in a very competitive power market. I'm very proud of our team, their commitment to our values and strategy, and the results they delivered in 2017."

BNI celebrated its achievement on Jan. 11 with a fleischkuehle feed at the mine and the company also purchased vests for all BNI employees. The Center Mine feeds the adjacent Milton R. Young Station, which recorded its second-highest peak for most electricity generated in a single year over the past 40 years. The Minnkota Power Cooperative's power plant had an extended maintenance outage in 2016 and a number of major outages in recent years as it invested more than \$425 million in environmental upgrades, but there were no major outages in 2017.

Here's what other North Dakota mines produced in 2017, according to the Bismarck (N.D.) Tribune:

- Freedom Mine north of Beulah, the largest lignite mine in the United States, produced and sold more than 14.7 million tons of lignite to the Antelope Valley Station, Leland Olds Station and the Great Plains Synfuels Plant. All three plants are owned by Basin Electric Power Cooperative.
- The Falkirk Mining Co. near Underwood produced 7.2 million tons, which were sold to Great River Energy's Coal Creek Station and Spiritwood Station.
- The Coyote Creek Mine sold 2.1 million tons to Otter Tail Power Co.'s Coyote Station. North American Coal Corp. owns the Freedom Mine, the Falkirk Mine and the Coyote Creek Mine.

Dakota Westmoreland's Beulah Mine sold 437,000 tons to Montana-Dakota's Heskett Station north of Mandan.

North Dakota's seven lignite-based power plants generate enough electricity to serve 2 million families in North Dakota and surrounding states.

"The lignite industry is unique in that our plants are generally adjacent to the mines, which reduces transportation costs," Jason Bohrer, president of the Lignite Energy Council, said in a statement. "It also means our state benefits from the jobs associated from both the mines and the power plants along with low-cost, reliable electricity generated from lignite."

BNI Coal is a subsidiary of ALLETE, which is headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota.