10-31-2000

Resist Newsletter, Oct. 2000

Resist

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/resistnewsletter

Recommended Citation
https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/resistnewsletter/326
Organizing Against Uranium Mining

Water Information Network Mobilizes in the Southwest

JAIME CHAVEZ

Uranium mining has taken place throughout the Navajo (Diné) Nation since the 1940s and today has left its scars in the form of more than 1,000 abandoned mine sites that need to be cleaned up. The largest quantities of uranium were mined in the Four Corners Area where New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah converge. Now Hydro Resources Inc. (HRI) and its parent company Uranium Resources Inc. (URI) propose a new round of mining that would leach uranium directly from a pristine groundwater aquifer that supports life for nearly 50,000 traditional Diné.

Native American and community activists, including the Water Information Network (WIN) and the Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM) are working together to challenge the company and reverse this repulsive trend of siting undesirable operations in disenfranchised communities.

The Real Dirt on Uranium Mining

According to Diné linguist and activist Esther Yazzie, uranium is known as leetso—meaning “yellow brown” or “yellow dirt.” It is from this yellow dirt that the first atomic bombs were developed at the secret Manhattan project in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and tested at the Trinity Site at Alamogordo, New Mexico. This nuclear legacy is an intimate part of the history and myths of the Diné people who continue to fight its negative effects. As Yazzie explains, Leetso is the yellow monster that continues to disrupt the Diné way of life. Like other aboriginal people, many Diné believe that uranium should be left in the ground so as not to wake the monster. According to Australian aboriginal beliefs, “the Rainbow Serpent, asleep in the earth, guards over the waters and elemental forces, protecting the integrity of life and creation.” To disturb these underworld elements will disturb the Serpent and will cause vengeance.

Many Diné suffer that vengeance in the form of illnesses related to the uranium industry. In 1979 a retention dam broke at a Church Rock mine site sending tons of radioactive waste down the Rio Puerco River from New Mexico into Arizona. The problem has never been sufficiently addressed and still disrupts the local Diné livestock industry. Radiation levels remain high today in the Church Rock area because of...
The corporate elites were stunned to hear the sounds of the Native American drum group and see the colorful banners at the entrance to their shareholder meeting. All they could say was, "Indians!"

Organizing Against Uranium Mining

continued from page one

emissions from 13 abandoned uranium mines. Diné of the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation in New Mexico have had to organize themselves to protect their lives and water and stop Hydro Resources Inc. (HRI) from in situ leach (ISL) uranium mining in the Westwater Canyon aquifer.

As the Diné say: Tó eii bé'íiná át'é, water is life. This battle to save the aquifer continues to generate a multi-layered legal and organizing campaign to stop the corporate desecration of the traditional Diné homeland. The traditional balance and harmony of the Diné has been disrupted to meet both the war and peacetime needs of the growing nuclear industry. The Diné contributed more than 13 million tons of uranium ore from their land to the US between 1945-1988.

The boom/bust of the uranium economy contributed to the desecration of Tsoodzil/ Mt. Taylor, a holy mountain for both the Pueblo people and the Diné. Not far away in Paguate, NM, the Jack pile mine—the largest US open pit uranium mine—attracted Diné, Pueblo, and Chicano workers, as well as newcomers, to contribute to the growing wage economy. With this new boom/bust industrial cycle came a wave of family violence, alcoholism and crime outside the circle of the clan and traditional lifeways.

Organizing Resistance

The Diné people formed Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM) in 1994 to challenge the Hydro Resources Inc. project and carry out their mission to "protect our precious water supplies and the health of our children by stopping uranium mining in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation." ENDAUM has extensively engaged in public education and outreach both on and off the Navajo reservation. They have gathered over 1,600 petition signatures to oppose the project, building a broad resistance by local chapter houses, where rural community-based politics are discussed and acted upon. The resolutions to stop the mining are widespread and are reflected strongly in a Navajo Nation Executive Order on Policy on Uranium Exploration and Mining that imposes "a moratorium on uranium mining until the Navajo people can be assured that all safety and health hazards related to such activity can be addressed and resolved."

The Westwater Canyon is the lifeblood of the Diné and sustains people, livestock, crops and wildlife. In a recent status report, the Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC) described the potential devastation of in situ leach mining proposed by HRI:

HRI would mine uranium by injecting a solution of water fortified with dissolved oxygen and sodium bicarbonate into a uranium-bearing rock formation. The solution dissolves the uranium from its host rock. The resulting uranium-laden solution is pumped to the surface for separation and refining of the uranium into yellowcake—the raw material used for fuel in nuclear reactors. Mining would occur in the Westwater Canyon Aquifer, a sandstone derived from ancient stream beds that is the only source of high quality drinking water for Crownpoint and an important source of water for domestic and livestock uses in Church Rock and other communities of the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Nation. More than 10,000 people currently in the area obtain their water from this aquifer.

Some Obstacles to Overcome

However, not all Diné are opposed to the proposed project. Some allottees, who are heirs to Navajo Tribal allotments and private homesteads, are supportive of HRI. As allottees, only a few stand to profit from uranium mining on their land. This has created division in the community.

Organizing with the Diné to stop this new wave of uranium mining that threatens the primary water source in the Navajo Eastern Agency has meant getting a handle on the Bilagaana/whiteman's form of western legal and corporate thought. It has meant stepping outside the traditional mindset of organizing at the chapterhouse and grassroots level in order to generate regional and national attention.

The legal issues that have been taken before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) by ENDAUM and SRIC involve an expensive and tedious process that has generated reams of testimony by experts and potentially impacted community members. One issue that runs to the core of the problem, according to Lila Bird, an attorney with the Environmental Law Center is that the concept of environmental justice is being violated. President Clinton's 1994 Executive Order 12898 directs all federal agencies to identify and address "disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies and activities, as affects low-income communities of color."

continued on page three
Taking Action

This cultural backdrop and ineffective public policy signaled the need for new creative organizing approaches. The Water Information Network is an 11-year-old grassroots organization made up of Native American, Chicano and rural communities working to prevent and clean up pollution of land, air and water in the southwest. In June of 1999, WIN and ENDAUM were forced to think strategically about how to best survey the Dallas playing field where URI and HRI's corporate headquarters are located.

Activists from WIN and ENDAUM had to walk on HRI's turf in the first year and work to gain entry to the annual stockholders meeting. We had to find out who our allies were on the ground in order to create the necessary public drama and sway public opinion in the conservative exclusive north side of Dallas. We connected with Native American, environmental, peace and justice, church and cultural groups and brought them together in a true rainbow coalition.

The corporate elites were stunned to hear the sounds of the Native American drum group and see the colorful banners at the entrance to their shareholder meeting. All they could say was, "Indians!" The place was crawling with press who attended our press conference inside the hotel as we received a solid commitment from the Dallas community to continue the fight to stop uranium mining and desecration of the aquifer on Native Lands.

The 1999 action surfaced new allies like Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney from Georgia, who was working with Jackie Katona, an Australian aboriginal organizer, to stop the Jabaluka uranium mine in Australia. McKinney asked what she could do for ENDAUM and this led to a broader national campaign that gathered more than 30 congressional signatures on a letter to President Clinton requesting that he write an Executive Order to stop the mining. New Mexico Congressman Tom Udall signed on to the campaign and continues to be an ally with ENDAUM to work toward economic solutions to curb the dependence on uranium exploitation.

In July 2000, WIN, ENDAUM and South Texas Opposes Pollution (STOP) spearheaded a second Dallas Action to generate more pressure on the corporation now facing potential bankruptcy. STOP is working to hold URI accountable for its mess in Texas. ISL mining has devastated the waters of Mexican communities in Southern Texas. Again the action was staged in front of the corporate headquarters of URI. ENDAUM leader Kathleen Tsosie, a resident of Crownpoint, NM, stated to the Associated Press, "We don't need any more devastation." She believes that uranium mining has caused cancer and other diseases among the Diné. This time protesters demanded that URI clean up its operations, and cease further mining in New Mexico and Texas.

The drama was intense and security was tight as a hand-carved head of a dragon with a sign around it's neck that read "the demise of uranium mining" led the protesters to march on URI's corporate headquarters. News of the protest traveled throughout Texas and sifted back into media sources in New Mexico and Native American communities. The action served to fire-up the opponents of uranium mining and rekindle the hope that grassroots action can make a difference.

Stepping out of the Box

The lesson learned is that it is necessary to understand the profile and psychology of a corporation in order to engage in battle outside the scope of their normal experience. Both sides had already grown accustomed to the legal, non-confrontational, sterile, administrative regulatory processes of the NRC. They were comfortable in that situation.

Organizing is not about comfort. Most of the time it means deliberate tactical confrontation. You also need a bit of fire in the gut (controlled, yet pointed) in order to cause a reaction and generate a solution. Leaders are being tested and continue to grow as a result of these actions. We are on the road to building a solid network of organizational relationships for the long haul committed to the preservation of the people and Mother Earth.

Jaime Chavez is an organizer for the Water Information Network. WIN received a grant from Resist earlier this year. For more information, contact WIN, PO Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106; win52@earthlink.net.

Sources:


The Nuclear-Free Future Award, "In the Spirit of the World Uranium Hearing, Prayers and remembrances for all the activists and victims who have given their lives in the atomic age."

Status Report: Crownpoint Uranium Project, Revision No. 6-September 1, 2000, prepared by Southwest Research and Information Center.

Navajo Citizens Oppose New Uranium Mining on Environmental Justice Grounds, by Lila Bird

Green Fire Report, a publication of the New Mexico Environmental Law Center
In far West Texas, on the Mexican border, a water war is developing. El Paso, Texas (700,000 people) continues to explosively grow in population and development in an unplanned, unsustainable pattern. Juarez, Mexico (2,000,000 people) just across the Rio Grande River from El Paso has also been experiencing explosive population growth. The growth is being fueled by multi-national companies and developers who promote maquiladoras or manufacturing “twin plants” in Juarez and warehouses in El Paso. These companies locate in Mexico, where workers make as little as three dollars a day. The border sister cities of Juarez and El Paso both use water from a shared aquifer, the Hueco Bolson. Juarez mines all of its water from the aquifer, while El Paso takes about half of what they use from the aquifer and the rest of their water needs from the Rio Grande River, which is the international boundary that marks the US/Mexico frontier.

Juarez is expected to run out of fresh water from the aquifer in four years. El Paso has an estimated 20 years left of fresh water from the aquifer. El Paso is busy planning to acquire more water from surrounding rural areas. The El Paso Public Service Board (PSB) has planned two water projects to meet the needs of future growth of the city. One project, dubbed The El Paso-Las Cruces Sustainable Water Project would take more water out of the Rio Grande River and build a water treatment plant to clean 80 million gallons per day (MGD) of river water for municipal use. The project would send 40 MGD through a 5 foot pipeline over a mountain pass from the aquifer as kind of a giant holding tank for future mining of groundwater. Also, another 120 MGD would be cleaned at existing water treatment plants.

**Water Project Not Sustainable**

If the proposed El Paso-Las Cruces project advances, the Rio Grande below El Paso will carry 45,000 acre feet of water less per year. The project would further reduce stream flows to the river in what is known as the “Forgotten River” segment of the Rio Grande. The water project plan would restore year round flows to a 100-mile section between southern New Mexico and El Paso at the expense of a 200-mile section, where river flows would be reduced by at least 28%. This “Sustainable” project would negatively impact the already challenged biological resources of the Rio Grande ecosystem below El Paso in Hudspeth County, as well as in Presidio and Brewster Counties into the Big Bend National Park. It would also negatively affect Mexican natural resources in the states of Chihuahua and Coahuila.

The Rio Grande between El Paso and Big Bend National Park is already in great need of more water, not less water. This “sustainable” project would cause the river to dry up in sections for months at a time. Taking an additional 45,000 acre feet out of the river every year from the already small flows below El Paso would further increase salinity of the river. Freshwater springs that wild animals and people drink from in this river section below El Paso may have decreased flows or stop running altogether.

**Pipe Line Dreams**

The El Paso Public Service Board also proposes the construction of a 60-inch pipeline stretching 100 miles—from El Paso to Dell City in Hudspeth County. Farmers and water speculators want to market rural underground water to El Paso, selling water every year to the city. The pipeline would also be constructed 100 more miles to Val-
Challenging the Demand-Side of Water

continued from page four

Grabbing All that Can Be Grabbed

It is evident to many that El Paso PSB does not care about environmental issues regarding the river or the aquifers. They see their job as securing as much water as they can in order to provide for the city’s future unplanned, explosive, unsustainable growth. That growth is being promoted by El Paso’s business and development interests that dominate the agenda for future water supplies for El Paso and its sister city Juarez. There are indications El Paso would also market water to Juarez, as the two million people there will have exhausted their portion of the freshwater in the aquifer in four years. El Paso’s economy is tied to Juarez because of the numerous large maquilas or twin plants that manufacture different goods. El Paso Water Utilities has also said they intend to be the “Regional Water Supplier,” eliminating and gobbling up all rural water districts who now supply water to communities in our vast rural region.

El Paso’s civic and business leaders continue to promote unsustainable explosive growth. Most of this promotion results only in low paying jobs for the people, drawing thousands of people to the El Paso-Juarez borderplex in search of these jobs. El Paso leaders feel the city’s growth will continue to be heavily tied to and dependent on maquilas (twin plants) and wants more built. Currently consumer goods like electronics, plastic injection manufacturing, and automobile parts are manufactured and assembled by trained low-wage Mexican workers and then shipped to twin companies in El Paso.

El Paso leaders are not even talking about controlling the population and trying to improve the quality of life for the existing population. Little attempt has been made to attract truly sustainable industry. The El Paso Chamber of Commerce invites and attracts to El Paso water intensive industries like stone washed jeans washing plants. Other water-intensive industries in the area include a gasoline refinery and the Fort Bliss Military Reservation, which offers no figures on water use and remains completely unaccountable to community residents.

The population of the El Paso-Juarez borderplex could brim to six million people by 2025, unless measures are taken to control growth and development. Available research shows that the current pattern of water use and growth is unsustainable. El Pasoans use an average of 163 gallons of water a day (gwd) per person. El Paso Water Utility’s “goal” is only to reduce use to 160 gwd per person. Dr. Travis Miller, a Texas A&M University agronomist and drought expert believes this is a problem, because “people can live quite nicely on just 75 gallons a day.” But to achieve this El Pasoans would have to say no to any new grass turf on new construction, and implement a 10-year phase-out of existing residential and commercial lawns in El Paso.

In the rural areas southeast of El Paso, where I live, we don’t have lawns. Water is for drinking and to grow food, not to create an unnatural environment at the expense of the region’s ancient aquifers and of the river. El Pasoans and everyone must recognize we live in a desert, and our precious water cannot be wasted on lawns, golf courses, jeans washing plants, and other water intensive industries. Farms and agriculture industries must also conserve water in every way, and their use patterns and waste must be examined and altered when necessary for efficiency and minimum waste.

In spite of its significance, a comprehensive understanding of the region is lacking. Research has shown concerns about the sustainability of the continued wasteful use of water, the continued reliance of supply-side water management, of infrastructure, of observed patterns in the production process (as well as consumption), of the water needs of the river ecosystem itself, to maintain reasonably good water quality. The research available shows and presents realistic concerns about water and social sustainability.

El Paso and Juarez share a border across the Rio Grande River, and share twin plant industries as well as water resources.

Continued explosive growth promotion must cease. The quality of life for future generations is much more important than the wishes and plans of special interests of developers and builders and multinational companies. A responsible plan would: 1) consider water as a limiting factor for growth and development; 2) reconstruct water pricing to reflect the real cost of water; and 3) provide transparency and accountability in management of finances related to water use—especially with regard to use fees.

Groups Begin to Take Action

In response to the unsustainable proposals to build a pipeline and place no limits on growth, activists are forming community-based resistance. In September, several organizations coordinated a People’s Water Summit, a town meeting to address the social and environmental concerns of water planning in West Texas. Further strategies and actions will arise from meetings such as this.

When demand grows faster than supply, demand management is required to bring it into balance with supply. Therefore, more attention should be given to control of the demand side, before considering any options for additional water supply. This has not happened. El Paso’s "leaders" have denied anything can be done to control growth and will not push any true conservation plan.

Bill Guerra Addington is a member of the Sierra Blanca Legal Defense Fund, which has received previous funding from Resist. For more information, contact them at PO Box 218, Sierra Blanca, Texas 79851; sbldf@igc.org.
SPECIAL GRANTS

The heart and soul of Resist’s funding program is the Priority Grant, which is awarded six times a year to support radical grassroots activism. The maximum award is $2,000 and can be used either to fund a specific project or for general support.

In addition to the Priority Grants, Resist offers several other funding opportunities. These are listed below. For more information about Resist funding, contact the office at (617)623-5110, or check out our web page: www.resistinc.org.

Emergency Grants:

Emergency grants of up to $300 are available on an “as-needed” basis. These grants are designed to help groups respond quickly to unexpected organizing needs. While it is impossible to precisely define an emergency, these grants are generally given to provide support for demonstrations or other events arising from a political crisis. Emergency grants are not intended to provide a safety net for groups who have failed to plan adequately for their financial needs, or who have missed the regular funding deadline.

Accessibility Grants:

RESIST is committed to supporting projects that enable all people to participate in the movement for social justice.

RESIST will fund the additional costs of projects or events which will make them accessible to people with disabilities (such as signers for events, or wheelchair accessible venues) for amounts up to $2,000. Application procedures are the same as for priority grants. If an organization receives funding for an accessibility project, it may apply again for a different project within the same 12-month period. Decisions on accessibility grants are based on the potential success of the underlying project.

Multi-Year Grant Program

Grantees who have been funded by RESIST at least two times during the preceding five years may apply for a multi-year grant. These three-year grants are designed to provide general support. Applicants must: 1) complete the Priority Grant Application; 2) submit answers to the Multi-Year Grant Questionnaire, and 3) be currently eligible to receive grant awards.

Receipt of year two and three of funding under this program will be conditioned upon RESIST’s review of specific progress reports each year which: 1) give evidence that the grantee is still engaged in activities comparable to those described in the original general support application; and 2) provide an action plan for meeting the organization’s future goals.

Media Related Grants

As part of its priority grants program, RESIST has funded a wide range of media-related projects and organizations. This stems from the belief that radical use of the media can powerfully impact organizing actions for change. The bottom line for a successful media proposal will be whether the project will be used specifically in the context of a campaign for social change.

RESIST will fund:
- the distribution costs of a film, video or radio project
- the purchase of video or audio equipment on a limited basis
- printing or copying costs for publications
- performances of fully developed plays or skits
- installation costs for exhibits
- general operating costs

RESIST will not support:
- production of films, videos or radio projects
- publications, media, “human interest stories” or cultural projects not directly connected to organizing campaigns
- presentations of film or video projects at film festivals or on public television
- script development
- travel expenses, funding for individuals, or social service projects
- projects originating outside the U.S.

Loans:

RESIST has a revolving loan fund for groups that are planning direct mailings, events, subscription campaigns and other projects that are intended to raise money. Groups can also apply to the RESIST loan fund for advance payments on bus rentals to transport members to marches or rallies. Loans are available in increments of $500 up to $2,000. Loan recipients are expected to repay the loan within six months unless a specific agreement has been made to the contrary. Application procedures for loans are the same as for grants. Decisions on loans are based on the potential success of the project, the group’s ability to repay the loan, as well as RESIST’s stated priorities for grantmaking.

Join the Resist Pledge Program

We’d like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge.

Pledges account for over 30% of our income.

By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant-making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded and the other work being done at Resist.

So take the plunge and become a Resist Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

Yes! I’ll become a RESIST Pledge.

I’ll send you my pledge of $ ______ every month/two months/quarter/six months (circle one).

[ ] Enclosed is an initial pledge contribution of $______.

[ ] I can’t join the pledge program now, but here’s a contribution of $______ to support your work.

Name __________________________
Address __________________________
City/State/Zip _______________________
Phone __________________________

Donations to Resist are tax-deductible.

Resist • 259 Elm Street • Suite 201 • Somerville • MA • 02144

Page 6 RESIST Newsletter October 2000