

Thank you Mother Earth for giving us the sacred water

Film forum in Kiza Park highlights environmental disturbances

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MANDERSON — It was a warm, Saturday in May, as people trickled in with covered dishes, film equipment, cameras, notebooks or just a healthy dose of curiosity. A prayer, led by Vic Camp, brought everyone together for a wonderful feast.

A second prayer, led by Floyd “Looks for Buffalo” Hand, marked the beginning of the presentation that everyone had come from near and far to see.

Oglala Lakota community leaders, students, and townspeople of Manderson, met to discuss environmental disturbances in a region within the boundaries of Ft. Laramie Treaty Lands, which includes a large section of the Northern Great Plains.

The uranium mining industry, ever encroaching upon the Lakota, expands as far as their recognized reservation lands and into the aquifers that lie beneath that land. Three films were presented by Owe Aku, “Bring Back the Way,” an organization spearheaded by Debra White Plume, which seeks to teach, exemplify and protect Lakota traditions, values and way of life in today’s world.

White Plume introduced the first film, *Water is Sacred, Water is Life*, by Shelley Contreras-Cook of the group Art is Action. Rather than a commercial or scientific view, this film gives insight into the Lakota perspective of water as something sacred and life giving, setting a tone of reverence for our Earth and the preciousness of Her resources. It begins with Afraid of Hawk playing a drum song which, translated, says, “Thank you Mother Earth for giving us the sacred water.”

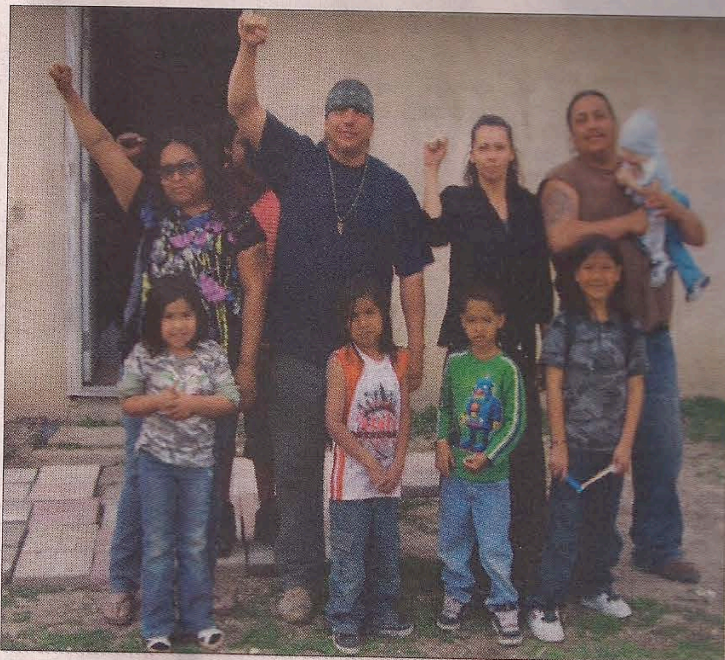
The second film illustrates the disastrous consequences of conventional Uranium mining in the southwestern United States. The film entitled, *Poison Wind – The Deadly Legacy*, documents the toll on humans and animals from radiation poisoning and contamination of land, air and water on the Navajo Pueblo. The film by Jenny Pond and 220 Productions relates the horrible account of the experiences of

Uranium mill workers at the Mount Taylor Mine in New Mexico.

The following are comments from several former mill workers and pueblo members from the Mount Taylor and Grand Canyon areas:

“Around the Grand Canyon numerous mines and mills have been abandoned, leaving the land contaminated.”

“The revitalization of the Uranium industry is economic blackmail; it is hard to say no to something that will bring money to your family when



Olowan Martinez, Posh Camp, Rayette Camp, Vic Camp holding his son Wolf, Olowans' girl, Dom White Plume, Tori, Mato White Plume.

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you're living in poverty."

"We were misled into believing that we were patriotic for mining Uranium for weapons to defend our country."

"When I'm struggling for air there is no one to help me. I have to have my oxygen."

"Are we blind enough to believe that mining operations care about our welfare as indigenous people? Are we blind enough to believe that these corporations who go into third world or developing countries to mine Uranium, care about the people of those countries? They are greedy. They take their money and then they leave."

"Whenever they take it with them, they leave us with the mess."

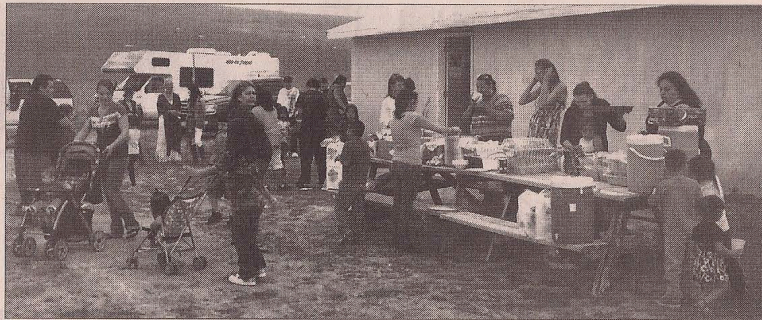
"Radioactive exposure from Radon is a major health issue here."

"Water which contained cyanide was the only water available down in the mines for the miners to use. We bathed in it. We drank it. The mud from contaminated water was on your boots, in your car and in your lunch box. The water was used to mix baby formula and to make coffee."

"Little children would play where the wind blew sand from the huge Uranium tailings piles."

"In the Mohave Desert, in New Mexico where nuclear weapons testing was done in 1962 and 1963, the people are not getting compensation, while people farther away in Nevada are."

"Brain tumors, infertility in men and women, these conditions are not getting treated. One lady who washed contaminated clothes worn by men who worked in the mines is dying of cancer."



A prayer, led by Vic Camp, brought everyone together for a wonderful feast during the film forum sponsored by "Owe Aku, Bring back the way."

"On July 17, 1979 the tailings dam broke. It was a wall of radioactive water. The EPA clean up effort was not enough."

"All it takes is one radioactive molecule in your body, and it can develop into one of many types of cancer."

"We belong to the Land," said a Havasupai elder. "What can I do for my Grandmother Earth?"

"We have lived through the horror of conventional mining."

White Plume then introduced the third film, *Crying Earth Rise Up!* The *Prairie Dust* Films production by Suree Towfighnia and Rosebud White Plume documents Uranium mining operations in western Nebraska and southwestern South Dakota.

In Crawford, Neb., site of the Crow Butte Resources, Inc. (CBR) Uranium mining operation, the townspeople are convinced that short-term monetary gains from the mine outweigh any potential hazards to human or animal health.

According to the Owe Aku web-

site, edited by Debra White Plume:

CBR, owned by Cameco, Inc., a Saskatchewan based corporation, uses the in-situ leach (ISL) mining method of extracting Uranium. The Uranium is piped from under ground using the available aquifer water. This contaminated water is then mixed with clean aquifer water and kept in underground cement containers called monitoring wells. After being stored in the monitoring wells, the sludge is pumped into an evaporating pond. The resultant Yellow-cake is transferred into 55 gallon steel drums and is eventually shipped to nuclear power or weapons plants.

The High Plains Aquifer flows under the CBR mine and parts of the Pine Ridge Reservation and contains portions of the Arikaree Aquifer, which flows under the middle of Pine Ridge. CBR is authorized to use up to 9000 gallons of aquifer water a minute, or 26.25 billion gallons of aquifer water over the course of the projected operation of the mining project.

At CBR there have been twenty-two documented leaks in the linings of the three, football field sized evaporation ponds, which are lined with vinyl or plastic, and one spill of 10,260 gallons of injection fluid. These license violations occurred every year of operation between August 12, 1997 and Sept. 26, 2006.

Crying Earth explains that Edgemont, northwest of the Pine Ridge Reservation, was once the site of an open pit Uranium mine. Uranium was milled close to Beaver Creek, which flows into the Cheyenne River, in an area over the Inyan Kara Aquifer and the White River Group. Although there is no conclusive evidence that the Uranium mines caused the contamination it is interesting that USGS and OST Rural Water tests from 2005 confirm that Arsenic, Radium 226 and 228, Barium, Thorium 230 and other Radioactive Alpha Emitters are present in the water sources on Pine Ridge. Even more interesting is the fact that Thorium 230 is not

naturally occurring but is a result of Uranium byproducts or tailings from mining.

These results found that 98 wells had levels of Arsenic 2-12 times higher than the maximum contaminant level (MCL). The wells have since been capped. There are still many who get water from 34 other wells that are fed by groundwater, according to Owe Aku. Many homes have been tested for Radon and were found to have unsafe levels of this Gross Alpha Emitter. Among the families living in these contaminated homes, at least one family member had died of cancer.

White Plume stated, "The contaminants can be detected in mother's milk. We have babies born with organs outside of their bodies and we have adrenal disease, pancreatic cancer and kidney disease. I don't want these little girls here to grow up and have babies with birth defects. We tested hundreds of homes all across Pine Ridge. Just across the highway is one of the highest levels of radioactive contaminants found, a level of 180. Those are illegal levels of radiation. The maximum is a level of 30."

After the presentation, Alex White Plume posed the question, "When we water the vegetables in our garden, are we poisoning ourselves? We need to know the areas where people should not use the water. Many die every year from cancer."

Pte San Win "Babe" Poor Bear shared her recent research of Zeolite deposits found near Porcupine. Zeolite, a rare substance that can bond with radioactive ions, is capable of retaining radioactive waste molecules. She also stressed the importance of conducting geostatistical

surveys before mining takes place adding that there is a lot of paperwork that must be done through the BIA and that the survey itself is a yearlong process. "The last geostatistical survey done in this area was in 1984," said Poor Bear.

These surveys provide data prior to mining that can be compared with the data gathered after mining begins. According to regional nuclear watchdog groups, Uranium miners who recently sought permits in Colorado are frustrated because the State requires companies to conduct water quality tests on proposed sites before they can start mining. This has put operations on hold and even prompted mining companies to file lawsuits against the State.

Debra White Plume brought the event to a close reminding us that in 1968, two hundred pounds of palladium had been stored in Edgemont. "We saw the increase of cancer and brain disease, we fought Kerr McGee in the 70s and we won! The United Nations has declared rights for Mother Earth, but the miners don't want to give Mother Earth rights." She rallied the audience by saying, "The Uranium miners are coming. They are here! The natural gas miners are coming. They are here! I spoke with the tribal elders and they say, 'We must watch them.' Wherever we are, we must protect our water!"

"Always remember that the voice you speak with is not your own. My voice belongs to my people and to this land." — Navajo speaker in the film *Poison Wind*.

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