

Native American **COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION PROGRAM**



The New Mexico Environmental Law Center

The New Mexico Environmental Law Center's *Native American Community Representation Program* provides free and low-cost legal services to Native American communities in our state whose health, environment, and cultural resources are threatened by environmental degradation.

Since 1993, our Native American clients have included the Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining, Haaku Water Office of Acoma Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo, Picuris Pueblo, Sacred Alliances for Grass-roots Equality (SAGE Council), San Ildefonso Pueblo, Santa Clara Pueblo, Taos Pueblo, and Tewa Women United. *Please see reverse for our current cases and find more information at our website, www.nmelc.org.*

Victories & Progress

CROWNPOINT URANIUM CASE (*started in 1996 - ongoing*) - Our client is fighting proposed *in situ* leach uranium mining that would contaminate the drinking water source for 15,000 residents of the Crownpoint-Church Rock region, nearly all of whom are Navajo. We have filed the first case ever against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission concerning the issuance of a federal license for this type of mining.

PICURIS PUEBLO MICA MINE CASE (*started in 1998 - ended 2006*) For fifty years, the people of Picuris Pueblo watched as an industrial mica mine destroyed their aboriginal lands and the clay deposits upon which their potters depend. Due to the work of the Law Center and its allies, the mining companies settled with the Pueblo and returned its land. The Pueblo has nearly completed its reclamation of the site.

OPEN BURNING OF TOXICS AT LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY (*started in 2005 - ended 2006*) Representing Tewa Women United and others, the Law Center successfully advocated for the State to cancel two open burning permits for the Laboratory, due to potential health impacts on downwind communities. The Laboratory sought to burn explosives, depleted uranium and other hazardous materials.

NEW MEXICO URANIUM GROUNDWATER STANDARD (*started in 2002 - ended 2006*) Until 2004, New Mexico used a Cold War-era uranium groundwater standard of 5,000 (μ /L) – in stark contrast to the World Health Organization's 2 μ /L recommendation. We successfully advocated for the State to reduce the standard to 30 μ /L, which gives communities a powerful tool for protecting their groundwater.

DINÉ NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION ACT (*started in 2003 - ended 2005*)

The Law Center helped our clients successfully advocate for a Navajo Nation ban on uranium mining and milling in Navajo Indian Country.



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“We were a small community going up against a giant corporation, with its fleet of lawyers and vice-presidents; we could use all of the help that we could get. While our People picketed the mine in protest, the Law Center worked to stop the mine in the courts.”

—Richard Mermejo, Picuris Pueblo, former client

“The Law Center gives tribes the tools to bridge the gap between traditional and western concepts of law, and to use the court system to help the tribes protect their sovereignty and culture.”

—Richard Deertrack, Taos Pueblo, former client and Law Center Board President

“I wonder if the men who run uranium companies, and the men in Washington D.C. have no children. Because I can't imagine that anyone who has sons and daughters can sentence other people's children to a future of uranium.”

—Christine Smith, Crownpoint, ENDAUM member

“We always remember that the Federal Aviation Administration is in the airport building business, and our job is to protect our way of life.”

—Gil Suazo, Sr., Taos Pueblo, current client

Taos Regional Airport Expansion

Client: Taos Pueblo

The Law Center's oldest case concerns Taos Pueblo's efforts to prevent or limit the expansion of the Taos Regional Airport. Expansion would further threaten the Pueblo's culture with increased noise pollution and visual disturbances, and possibly cause damage to the tribe's 600-year-old landmark adobe structures.

Crownpoint/Church Rock Uranium Mines

Client: Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM) and Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC)

Since 1996, the Law Center has represented citizens from Crownpoint and Church Rock who are fighting to prevent proposed *in situ* leach uranium mining. The mining would contaminate their sole source drinking water aquifer and contaminate the air with radioactivity. This is the first time that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has licensed this type of mine in a high-quality drinking water aquifer. It is also the first time that *any* organization has stood up to the NRC on this type of mining.

Generic Environmental Impact Statement for *in situ* leach uranium mines

Clients: ENDAUM, SRIC, Haaku Water Office of Acoma Pueblo, Bluewater Valley Downstream Alliance

Despite the fact that no *in situ* leach uranium mine has ever been cleaned up to pre-mining standards, the NRC seeks to streamline its licensing process by limiting public participation and reducing the number of site-specific studies required for new mines. The new system would impact Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota and Wyoming—states with significant indigenous communities near uranium reserves.

Haaku Water Office Government-to-Government Consultation

Client: Haaku Water Office of Acoma Pueblo

Uranium companies are once again eyeing the Grants Mineral Belt, home to several tribal communities whose environments and health are still being impacted by Cold War-era uranium contamination. We represent the Haaku Water Office in its consultation with state and federal agencies concerning proposed new uranium mining within the Pueblo's Cultural Province.

Marquez Canyon Uranium Mine Exploratory Permit Proceeding

Client: Haaku Water Office of Acoma Pueblo

We are opposing the first non-minimal impact exploration permit application to the State for uranium mining, which would allow the drilling of 41 boreholes. Drilling could irreversibly contaminate groundwater and would defile lands adjacent to Mt. Taylor, a culturally significant place.

Photos, from left: sign at Crownpoint municipal well, located 1/2 mile from proposed uranium mining; a Picuris protester stops a truck at the entrance to the mica mine; Navajo youth outside federal courthouse in Denver, CO for Crownpoint uranium case; school bus in Church Rock; signing of Diné Natural Resources Protection Act in Crownpoint.