As societies shift away from fossil fuels to combat climate change, business and government are eager to increase mining to provide metals for replacement technology. New devices, machines, and infrastructure will require an increase in metals such as lithium and copper, considered "critical minerals" by the United States.

What will be the consequences of energy transition policies that encourage aggressive mineral extraction?

One clear consequence is the disproportionate effects to communities adjacent to the mining operations. These frontline communities are under pressure to acquiesce to mining proposals, which means more destruction to land base, livelihoods, and life ways. They become sacrifice zones for the sake of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and staving off the worst of our changing climate.

The proposed Thacker Pass lithium mine (Peehee Mu’uh in the Paiute language) in Humboldt County, Nevada provides a powerful example of the potential effects of fast-tracked lithium mining on Indigenous people. The People of Red Mountain, descendents of the original Paiute inhabitants of the region wrote:

"Thacker Pass is essential to the survival of our traditions...When our land is destroyed, our traditions are destroyed. Thacker Pass is home to many of our traditional foods. Some of our last choke cherry orchards are found in Thacker Pass. We gather chokecherries to make pudding, one of our oldest breakfast foods. Thacker Pass is also a rich source of yapa, wild potatoes. We hunt groundhogs and mule deer in Thacker Pass. Mule deer are especially important to us as a source of meat, but we also use every part of the deer for things like clothing and for drumkins in our most sacred ceremonies...[it] is one of the last places where we can find our traditional medicines. We gather ibi, a chalky rock that we use for ulcers and both internal and external bleeding. COVID-19 made Thacker Pass even more important for our ability to gather medicines. Last summer and fall, when the pandemic was at its worst on the reservation, we gathered toza root in Thacker Pass, which is known as one of the world's best anti-viral medicines."

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GBRW Welcomes New Staff & Board Members

Great Basin Resource Watch welcomes Kassandra Lisenbee as our new outreach and program coordinator. Kassandra is wrapping up her degree at the University of Nevada in Environmental Policy and has been working with GBRW on our influence of mining on water resources project (see page 7). She comes to GBRW with much enthusiasm for our mission, fresh ideas on our work, and a good environmental justice compass.

The GBRW Board of Directors also has a new member. Monique Normand, originally from Las Vegas, Nevada, holds a Masters degree in social work and an avid supporter of Environmental and Social Justice. She was previously a community organizer with the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, and gained interest in environmental issues while working on the Nevada clean power plan. Additionally, while working at PLAN, Monique also helped engage the community about water and mining issues.

Monique also previously worked at the University of Nevada, Reno and is currently a licensed social worker and the field supervisor for interns at RISE (Reno Initiative for Shelter and Equality). Monique serves on the board of the Nevada Coalition Against the death penalty, and NNBCAS (Northern Nevada Black Cultural Awareness Society).

Chelsey Hand left GBRW last fall to pursue a long held interest in working at a fish hatchery in New York. We thank her for her dedication to GBRW’s mission and the communities we stand with. Indeed she is missed and will remain engaged in our work, just not as staff. From all of GBRW we wish Chelsey well in her life’s path.

Glenn Miller Retires from GBRW Board of Directors

Besides his involvement for many years as a UNR chemistry professor and researcher, Glenn Miller, Ph.D. found the time and heart to be one of the founders of Great Basin Resource Watch, in March 1994 (founded as Great Basin Mine Watch). Glenn recognized the need for an independent mining watchdog presence in the Great Basin that was not swayed by profits or politics. We are sad to announce his retirement from the Board of Directors.

Just prior to the founding of GBRW, Glenn was a critical author of the 1989-1990 modern mining regulations for the state of Nevada. Glenn has been a recognized national and international presence for over 30 years as an advocate for mining reform and advancement of best environmental practices. We wish Glenn the very best.

It’s hard to find the right words to say how much we’ve appreciated his steady presence, expertise, and guidance for all these years.
GBRW has been hearing the same concerns and objections from people in Chile, Serbia, Portugal, Australia, Spain, and the U.K., who face the negative repercussions of existing or proposed lithium mining. Our involvement with an international group of frontline community members, Yes to Life No to Mining Lithium (YLNM lithium), and ally organizations affected by proposed and existing lithium extraction, has increased our knowledge of global lithium mining concerns.

Nearly all mines including Thacker Pass are being developed without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of local populations, and/or adequate participatory consultation with local communities, which are sometimes forced to move off ancestral lands. FPIC is contained in the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People,” and recognized internationally as a minimum for any project proposed on indigenous lands and provides for the community right to say no. Examples of violent conflicts between mining multinationals and opposing citizens are well-documented and growing, according to Global Witness.

“In 2020, we recorded 227 lethal attacks—an average of more than four people a week—once again the most dangerous year on record for people defending their homes, land and livelihoods, and ecosystems...these lethal attacks include intimidation, surveillance, sexual violence, and criminalisation. Our figures are almost certainly an underestimate...”

US Department of Transportation data shows that, “If just one driver per household switched to taking public transportation for a daily commute of 10 miles each way, this would save 4,627 pounds of carbon dioxide per household per year—equivalent to an 8.1% reduction in the annual carbon footprint of a typical American household.”

GBRW stands with the international community calling for a just energy transition. Climate policies should address the inequity of people living near mines, who shoulder the effects of mining/extraction for the benefit of those who consume the products of extraction.

Climate policy should recognize that extraction is one of the reasons why our planet’s climate system is out of balance. According to the UN International Resource Panel:

- 90 percent of biodiversity loss and water stress are caused by resource extraction and processing.
- The extraction of metals and minerals has risen significantly, from 11.6 billion tons in 1970 to 53.1 billion tons in 2017, accounting for 20% of climate impacts.

Supplying elements critical to replacing fossil fuels should not be worse for the health of the Earth than the problem it’s solving.

The YLMN lithium Communique, released in September 2021, proposed five principles for a just energy transition summarized here:

1. Reduce demands for materials and energy.*
3. Recognize that communities have the right to say no.
4. Address climate change from a holistic perspective.
5. End corporate impunity.

* Alternatives to massive increases in mining for energy transition metals include recycling and public transportation:

According to a report from the Institute for Sustainable Futures, “Recycling has the potential to reduce primary demand compared to total demand in 2040, by approximately 25% for lithium, 35% for cobalt and nickel and 55% for copper, thus significantly reducing the demand for new mining...”

Here are a few actions citizens can take to reduce the pressure on frontline communities and improve mine permitting processes here in the U.S.

1. Advocate for aggressive recycling including recycling by design. For example, contact your US Congressional Representatives to support Senate Bill 3356: tinyurl.com/batt116

2. Contact your representatives about funding education on the benefits of public transit, expansion of public transit, and electrification of public transit. Participate in and encourage representatives and agencies to participate in the “Sustainable Transit for a Healthy Planet”: transit.dot.gov/climate-challenge

3. Tell the U.S. Dept of Interior, your congressional representatives, and President Biden to support proposed changes to the federal mine permitting process: tinyurl.com/ewtribes


2 U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, “Public Transportation’s Role in Responding to Climate Change, January 2010.
As the Bristlecone goes to press, there has been no excavation at Thacker Pass. The Bureau of Land Management has issued a permit for the cultural and archeological survey that must be done in advance of any mine site construction. We expect that the survey will not move forward until after winter.

The Trump Administration approved the mine plan and signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on January 15, 2021. GBRW concluded that the process surrounding the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was fast-tracked and sloppy, resulting in one of most poorly written analyses we have seen in the past 15 years.

GBRW will not loosen our standards in mine permitting regardless of the end use of the mineral. GBRW is not opposed to the electric transition and acknowledges the need for effective battery technology. But, new mines need to adhere to environmental protections and community engagement standards. This was not the case for Thacker Pass. The EIS process was conducted in 2020 during COVID restrictions. The process should have been paused until the directly-affected community could openly deliberate about the mine plan and develop a full understanding of the consequences of the mine. As a result, GBRW knew we had to file against the federal permit. (gbrw.org/proposed-thacker-pass-lithium-mine)

There have been multiple legal filings on the EIS/ROD, including one filed in February, 2021 in which GBRW was involved. These cases have been consolidated and we anticipate a ruling from Federal Reno District Court Judge Du this spring. A number of preliminary injunctions were filed in 2021 to prevent any preparatory construction and trenching for the cultural and archeological survey process. Judge Du denied all of them, but this does not mean that the general cases filed in February and in July will not be successful. There are additional conditions that need to be satisfied for a preliminary injunction to succeed, which the court ruled were not met.

As of January 28, 2022, Lithium Nevada Corp (LNC) has not received all of its state permits, including the Class II Air Quality permit and the Water Pollution Control (WPC) permit. GBRW has significant concerns about these permits, particularly the WPC permit. LNC has yet to demonstrate that the mine will not require long-term active site management to prevent water pollution. (gbrw.org/publications)

The tribal consultation process was also inadequate. BLM sent a letter to the Fort McDermitt tribe but offered no in-person consultation. This was also during COVID restrictions. GBRW was told by tribal members that the community had all it could handle with high levels of COVID outbreaks. The poor consultation is evident in the lack of detail in the EIS of the cultural significance of Thacker Pass. Only after the federal permit was approved and the legal filing occurred with increased media attention on Thacker Pass did all of the Fort McDermitt tribe become aware of the mine plan. They then spoke out about the cultural importance of the area. These concerns and details of the cultural significance of Thacker Pass should have been in the EIS.
As Nevada’s 2021 spring legislative session began, GBRW was busy working with partners to advance environmental justice and greater mining accountability at a structural level. The three main bills and resolutions we worked on are explained below.

Environmental Justice Review Process (ACR3)
GBRW formed a coalition behind a resolution that would have required the state to study the best way to implement a Nevada environmental justice review process. Although it did not pass this session, vital relationships were formed, and mobilization for the implementation of such a review process came from widespread and crucial communities throughout the state.

Uniform requirements for analyzing whether significant resource-altering projects will have a disproportionate effect on some communities do not currently exist, so legislation growing out of this resolution would work towards alleviating the environmental injustices and harm caused by projects permitted in Nevada (such as so many of the mining operations we’ve seen).

Unfortunately, the proposal was not passed, but there will be opportunities for its content to be explored in standing legislative committees. We will watch for these opportunities and push for implementation of environmental justice in all the places we can. Work on this resolution has certainly paved a path for this much needed incorporation of environmental justice into state policy. We are hopeful and excited to see the day it comes to fruition. We are grateful for all those who were a part of advocating for this vision with us this session! Keep an eye out for how you can provide support for this reform.

Many thanks to all our partners, especially the Nevada Environmental Justice Coalition and the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter!

Bad Actor Bill (AB 148)
One of the mining justice success stories of this session was the passage of the commonly-known Bad Actor Bill, which would prohibit mining corporations and those with controlling interests in the corporation from starting new mines in the state if they have failed to clean up past mines. Language is being drafted, and we will look for ways we can use it to make mining projects in Nevada more accountable. Big thank you to Assemblywoman Peters for carrying this bill!

Mining Tax Resolutions
Our wonderful friends at the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter have written a brief summary of how the multiple mining tax resolutions played out:

This session, the Nevada Legislature ignored AJR1**, AJR2** and SJR1**, all of which were passed in the 2020 special session to levy higher taxes on Nevada’s mining industry. Instead, late at night on the 118th day of the 120-day session, Assembly leaders introduced AB495, a 4th option for mining tax reform. Although AB495 bill took too long to be developed, came too late in the session, did not include tribes or progressive stakeholders in discussions that shaped this bill, and did not address the sweetheart deal baked into our constitution that mining companies enjoy, the bill will bring between $150 million and $300 million to the state’s coffers and Nevada’s struggling education system. We also appreciate that this bill taxes gross proceeds, does not sunset, and directs funds to educate Nevada’s children. These are significant steps in good directions. But they are just the beginning of the work that needs to be done to ensure that mining companies compensate Nevadans fairly for the wealth they take and the damage they leave behind.

Mining Oversight and Accountability Commission (MOAC)
The Mining Oversight and Accountability Commission, which was created in 2011 has long since been unable to function due to the governor’s failure to appoint members. But, it experienced a rebirth this session, thanks to the defeat of a GBRW opposed bill that tried to formally dissolve MOAC. As a result of the bill’s defeat, commission members were appointed and MOAC had its first meeting. With finally enough commission members to meet, MOAC had its first meeting in years on October 28th, 2021.
The proposed lithium mine at Peehee Mu’huh (Thacker Pass, Humboldt County) and the proposed Rhyolite Ridge Mine near Tonopah gained international attention throughout 2021. But, many other lithium proposals are quietly moving forward across Nevada as shown in this partial map by the Center for Biological Diversity.

Here is a snapshot of some projects nearing permitting by state and federal agencies:

**Tonopah Lithium Claims Project (TLC)**

The TLC project, owned by American Lithium, is 6 miles northwest of Tonopah on Western Shoshone sovereign nation treaty lands. Exploratory drilling is ongoing. And, the corporation received $2.5 million from the US Department of Energy to prove the extraction method as the corporation proceeds with satisfying regulators and enticing investors. According to American Lithium, work planned for TLC includes continued drilling, construction of test pits, preparing the pilot plant, and preparing cultural/biological surveys.

**Jindalee Resources Project**

The Jindalee project is in southeastern Oregon and owned by Jindalee Resources. It is in the same McDermitt Caldera lithium deposit as the proposed Thacker Pass mine, which means that the entire region could become a sacrifice zone for lithium mining. At the end of 2021, drilling for lithium began at Jindalee, which moves the project closer to a feasibility study which would precede federal and state permitting.

**Clayton Valley**

At least nine projects are proposed for Clayton Valley, west of Tonopah, with more in the surrounding basins. This is the location of the Silver Peak mine, which is the only producing lithium mine in the US. Projects in this region generally differ from those discussed above in that they are lithium brine projects. Water rights and allocations have been a contentious issue among corporations and between corporations and the community as they try to claim portions of the lithium in the basins’ groundwater.

**Railroad Valley**

3PL Operating wants to mine lithium from groundwater in Railroad Valley. The company proposes a new direct capture method of extraction to limit consumptive loss of water. But, the project is not environmentally friendly. In fact, federal agencies and the Center for Biological Diversity filed protests on an application to pump 101,400 acre feet of water. State water policy is focused on consumptive loss of groundwater and does not address how pumping and re-injecting massive quantities of water will affect the dynamic of the aquifer. Western Shoshone communities, endangered species, and other water users could be devastated through such a large-scale pumping project.

Policy makers and the public must be aware of all mining for minerals used in energy technology, including copper and vanadium. GBRW urges readers to understand the full scope of mining impacts, including those falsely marketed as climate solutions, impacts to Indigenous peoples and other communities, and water, air, and land pollution inherent to mining.
In 2021, GBRW analyzed how mining operations influence water rights in the Crescent Valley and Kobeh Valley groundwater basins in Nevada’s Eureka and Lander counties. Our initial analysis sought to determine the amount of water rights held by different types of owners. We found that mining operators hold 81% of active water rights in the Crescent Valley Basin. In Kobeh Valley, individuals and small family agriculture make up the largest holders of water rights at 52.3%. Mining operators are the third largest type of owner at 16.5%. Water rights held by mining operators are not just for mining uses. For example, in the Crescent Valley basin, mining operators hold 81% of all the water rights designated for agricultural use (for this project, agricultural water use is defined as water rights designated for irrigation and stock watering).

We also looked at the quantity of water allocated under these permits. Original estimates based on permit information from the Nevada Division of Water Resources (NDWR or the State Engineer’s office) raised concerns because water totals far exceeded the amount of available water in the basin. This concern prompted meetings with NDWR to discover why public records of water rights do not reflect accurate amounts of available water in each basin. As it turns out, NDWR has a system of groups, usually based on projects or locations that have the same water right holder but with mixed types of use. These groups are given a total combined duty (amount of water allocated, typically in acre-feet annually) or TCD. Permits within a group can be used at the discretion of the water rights holder as long as their TCD does not exceed the limit placed on the basin by NDWR.

Once we recognized the TCDs we could separate out how much water was being allocated by owner. But, because there is a mix of uses within a TCD group, we do not know the total amount of water for each use. We found that mining operators have been allocated 23,552 acre-feet annually in the Crescent Valley basin or 91% of total allocated water. Of that 23,552 acre-feet, a single mining corporation, Nevada Gold Mines LLC, holds 95% or 22,400 acre-feet per year. Mining operations hold fewer water rights in the Kobeh Valley basin but the quantity of water allocated to them is 82% of all water allocations or 19,362 acre-feet per year.

This study has led to more questions about how mining affects water rights in Nevada and what consequences this has for frontline communities:

1. How is the principle of prior appropriation under Nevada water law adhered to given these TCD groups?
2. Why are mining operators so interested in agricultural water?
3. How do these basins compare to other basins in the state?

The answers to these questions will help determine how mining affects frontline communities’ access to water.

John Hadder, GBRW executive director, says "the lack of transparency about the actual allocation of water rights in spite of extensive state monitoring should be addressed by changes in policy at the state level".
In early 2021, members of the Fort McDermitt tribe and other Indigenous people formed People of Red Mountain (PRM). According to High Country News, the group opposes the mine, which is on tribal homelands and was the site of two massacres of Indigenous people in the 1800s. The project would use about 1.7 billion gallons of water per year. Gary McKinney, Shoshone Paiute of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in northern Nevada and southern Idaho, is a member of the group.

He told GBRW that Peehee Mu’huh is the traditional name for Thacker Pass. “Peehee means spoiled and Mu’huh is moon so it translates to “Rotten Moon,” he explained. “It signifies the brutality and the gore that took place back there. Now we consider that a sacred resting place, as do the Arapaho and Shoshone Tribes in Colorado with the Sand Creek massacre.”

McKinney said he got involved with PRM through a spiritual connection. “My reason for joining in this fight is to ensure that our future generations don’t suffer for these mistakes. As a people, it is our responsibility to make that spiritual connection with the land and continue to focus on our roots rather than the money.”

A Fort McDermitt elder and member of PRM told GBRW, “The only change we want to see is getting more rain and snow. We want to see the deer, antelope, sage grouse and rabbits continue to migrate through Peehee Mu’huh year after year.”

Here are highlights from GBRW’s conversation with Gary McKinney:
How is Thacker similar and different from native led fights against oil pipelines?

We as Northern Paiute Tribes are not as big as the Tribes fighting the pipelines. We have our own reasons which are written along with the treaties. The difference between those oil pipelines and this lithium is that the lithium is a lot dirtier than other things we have seen. With the green energy switch from fossil fuels to lithium, we need to consider the processing of lithium which is dirtier than what they are leading people to believe. We need to think more and believe less.

What would you like Peehee Mu’huh to be like in 100 years?

In 100 years I want humility and spirituality at Peehee Mu’huh. We are unabashed with standing our ground and we focus on this land here. We work together and fulfill our prophecies. We work through these tests as human beings and we can stand on that pass together. It won’t just be me; there will be a lot of people there. That is a reason to be optimistic - us humans are compassionate and caring for each other but we are distracted. We are distracted by being told what to think by corporations when we were all given free will.

In 100 years I want us to be teaching our young that there have been influential people in our communities that have made an impact. That’s when you start to see the flower growing through the concrete. In 100 years we still want to be teaching our youth using the plants and medicines to take that back to our homes.

How can people support efforts to address climate change in a way that is in solidarity with Indigenous Communities?

Right now it would be the time we use social media and the lithium batteries in our phones to advantage. If we all took pictures of something beautiful that will help with a change. We have to remember the beauty of things and document it and share it with each other so we all see the beauty in what we do. No time for hate, no time for negativity.

Great Basin Resource Watch Donors...

Thank you!

Some of you have been our contributors since the beginning in 1994. Some of you have joined up recently. Sincere thanks to all of you—the individuals, businesses and foundations who make our work possible.

GBRW is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible.
On October 4, 2021, fifteen people met in the remote Fish Creek Range in Eureka County where Nevada Vanadium wants to build a vanadium mine. We talked for four hours about the proposed mine with Ron Espel, a company representative. The current mine plan is for a fairly small mine, but there are significant additional ore deposits to the south, which could ultimately double the mine excavation.

Vanadium, like lithium, is being touted as an energy transition metal, to be used for large scale vanadium flow batteries. The batteries would be part of a solar or wind farm to provide energy storage, and would have the capacity to be “indefinitely rechargeable,” an advantage over lithium-based storage batteries. Vanadium is also an industrial metal used to harden steel and increase its rust resistance.

Concerns from attendees of the site visit are:

- Destruction of the landscape and habitat that results from open-pit mining
- Noise and light pollution will have negative impacts on the quiet valley
- The mine plan also calls for leaving a sulfuric acid heap leach pad - a source of significant pollution over time
- The operation is proposed to have a uranium product, “yellow cake” as well, which significantly reduces the uranium in the mine waste, but will introduce uranium into commerce. This means uranium fission waste somewhere else, so the problem of uranium does not go away. Furthermore, yellow cake is a primary starting material in the development of nuclear weapons.

The Bureau of Land Management office is reviewing the draft Environmental Impact Statement. GBRW expects it to be released during the first quarter of 2022. The state level permitting is not completed. GBRW will keep you posted.
The Long Canyon gold mine expansion in Elko County was suspended last year after the formal water protest action was filed by GBRW, Center of Biological Diversity, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, Wild Horse Education, and The Pequops Conservancy. The expansion remains on hold, and we have learned that the mine will go into “care and maintenance” as of the first quarter of 2022. This effectively means that the mine will lay idle and have no new mining. Despite this development, Nevada Gold Mines (NGM), owner of the Long Canyon mine, is not planning to withdraw the water applications for the expansion, so the underground mine is still potentially in the works.

By John Hadder

The proposed expansion and dewatering of the mine would pump on average 45,000 acre-feet per year (over half the annual water use by the Truckee Meadows Water Authority) for 20 or more years, removing over 300 billion gallons of water from the deep aquifer. This aggressive pumping will lower the water table around the mine site by at least 1000 feet. This will quickly dry up the Johnson Springs Wetland Complex (JSWC), comprising 88 individual springs with combined total long-term average flow of 1,715 gallons per minute (2,770 acre-feet per year). See Bristlecone December 2019.

The United States Geological Service released a report (Hydraulic Characterization of Carbonate-Rock and Basin-Fill Aquifers near Long Canyon, Goshute Valley, Northeastern Nevada, (tinyurl.com/usgslong)) in spring 2021. The report further confirms that the proposed groundwater pumping for the underground mine expansion would rapidly and dramatically affect the Johnson Springs Wetland Complex. While this connection is not new information, the data and analysis in the report reinforce that mitigation of the mine’s effect on springs will be very difficult.

GBRW has been trying to set up a meeting with Nevada Gold Mines on the Long Canyon Mine about possible alternatives to the original plan. We did have a mine site visit scheduled for the first week of October, 2021, which was canceled due to COVID-19 risks. We will reschedule when it is safe to visit. In the meantime, we will meet virtually with NGM to assess future plans.

GBRW will keep you posted on this and whether action is needed. For now, the expansion is stopped; the groundwater aquifers, springs and species that depend on them are de facto protected.

Since our last newsletter in December 2020, the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection (NDEP), which oversees the cleanup process at the toxic, closed Anaconda Copper Mine in Lyon County, has announced progress on several deliverables.

On December 11, 2020 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released notification for public comment regarding an Environmental Assessment of the sale of 2,062 acres of land in and around the abandoned Anaconda Mine in Yerington, NV to Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). The proposal was requested by ARCO, and replaces the previous attempt to transfer public land at the site to ARCO through Representative Amodei’s bill HR 5347.

Under this proposed land disposal BLM would be removed from oversight. In a media release, GBRW stated, “The BLM’s responsibility is to the public interest in lands that it has been entrusted to protect, not to cater to the desires of private corporations.” We have not seen any continuation of this process under the Biden Administration, but we are watching and will oppose this kind of action.

This summer, construction began on capping the Arimetco heap leach pads, a particular source of contamination.

Of great importance are the release of a draft version of report about the potential human health and ecological risks from:

1) the site-wide groundwater - The Draft OU-1 (Site-Wide Groundwater) HHRA Report. The public comment period closed on November 17, 2021.

2) a preliminary report for the pit lake, the Draft OU-2 (Yerington Mine Pit Lake) SLERA Report, will show its potential human health and ecological risks. When it becomes public, a 45-day comment period will be announced.

To view either (the pit lake report when available) go to tinyurl.com/anacondapit

Username: public@ndep-anaconda.com
Password: Copper12# (the second character is a zero, not a capital O)

The NDEP website for the mine: tinyurl.com/ndepanaconda

To get on the NDEP mailing list for public notices about the mine email: acms@ndep.nv.gov

Six Mile Canyon in the North Pequop Range just east of the Long Canyon Mine. Mine expansions could threaten this striking narrow canyon. Photo: 2011 by GBRW
The latest mining expansion in the Cortez mining complex in and around Crescent Valley, Nevada will go underneath Mt. Tenabo. The new mine is called “Goldrush,” and the entrance to the underground mine will be in the Cortez Hills mining pit at the southern base of Mt. Tenabo.

For the Western Shoshone, Goldrush is yet another blow to their cultural and spiritual area at Mt. Tenabo. The plan is for the mine to tunnel under the southeastern flank of the mountain and continue beneath the protected Traditional Cultural Property of Horse Canyon.

The Horse Canyon area is and has been a special place for the Shoshone people dating back thousands of years. The laws on mining seem to forget the land and the people who live on it, that also predate Nevada statehood and intruders looking for gold who have been taking all the resources of the Shoshone people. The expanding of Barrick’s exploration activities into the Horse Canyon area tells the Shoshone people that the laws that protect tribes have no merit in legal terms. Barrick has known about this area before they purchased it from Placer Dome. I believe they were also doing exploration in Horse Canyon during the court case for Cortez. Barrick also is aware that the Horse Canyon area is under the protection of “TCP” (Traditional Cultural Protection). There are things that cannot be bought that are priceless. These things are only to be recognized and talked about on both sides to come to a resolution. The 1872 Mining Law is a violation under International Human Rights Forum on Indigenous Peoples and their lands.

- Larson Bill, Western Shoshone, South Fork Reservation

Western Shoshone elders say that all of their medicine plants were once growing in the area around Mt Tenabo, especially Horse Canyon.

Over the years, with permission from the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM), private mining and exploration companies have destroyed the cultural potency of this region. Even the BLM has noted that, “In summary, the Western Shoshone believe that areas once unaffected by development and encompassing the Puha and spirit of their ancestors have been diminished.” (Final EIS - Deep South Expansion Project Supplemental Environmental Report – Native American Traditional Values)

Western Shoshone say that Goldrush will cut into the spirit of the mountain. GBRW strongly opposes the Goldrush Project as we have the other mines around Mt Tenabo. It is likely that both the federal government and the mining company, which do not understand or value Western Shoshone spirituality, think that because the mine is underground that no further damage will be done to the cultural area. However, we now have a Native American Interior Secretary, Deb Haaland who can identify with the Western Shoshone. Join GBRW in reaching out to Secretary Haaland to direct the Bureau of Land Management to require cultural protections as proposed by Western Shoshone.

Here are a few ways you can contact the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Secretary:

Mailing Address:
Secretary Deb Haaland
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Phone (with employee directory): (202) 208-3100
FedRelay number: (800) 877-8339 (TTY)
In January 2021, the Nevada Supreme Court ruled against the Comstock Residents Association (CRA). The group filed a suit against Lyon County Board of Supervisors and Comstock Mining Inc (CMI) for denying due process to local residents in a land use and zoning decision by the county. The court rejected the residents’ argument that the supervisors had a significant private interest in the mining company and should have abstained from the vote.

CMI and Lyon County then sued CRA and resident Joe McCarthy for over $250,000 for payment of fees under a state law which seeks to deter frivolous claims. Judge Robert Estes, former Lyon Court District Attorney, ruled in favor of CMI and Lyon County. CRA has now appealed this decision in the countersuit to the Nevada Supreme Court.

CMI wants to rebrand itself in what it calls a “transformation green shift to tactical decarbonization.” It has entered into joint ventures that it describes as “green”, including a mercury remediation project and a company producing ethanol.

As for mining in the Comstock, the company’s website mentions more exploration plans in Storey and Lyon counties.

Comstock Residents Association just launched a fundraising effort to pay legal fees.

To contribute please send a check made out to the Comstock Residents Association to Box 425, Silver City, NV 89428 or go online to use a debit or credit card: tinyurl.com/comstocklegal

FEDERAL PERMITTING STALLED FOR PROPOSED RHYOLITE RIDGE LITHIUM MINE

By John Hadder

A federal permit for the proposed Rhyolite Ridge lithium mine is in limbo.

Thanks to actions by the Center for Biological Diversity, supported by GBRW, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing protection under the Endangered Species Act for Tiehm’s buckwheat, a plant found only in the vicinity of the proposed lithium mine on just 10 acres of public land in Esmeralda County in western Nevada.

The announcement of the proposed listing can be found at: tinyurl.com/tiehm

Patrick Donnelly, Nevada State Director for the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) said, “Tiehm’s buckwheat shouldn’t be wiped off the face of the Earth by an open-pit mine. The Service stepping in to save this plant from extinction is the right call.” CBD’s actions were most likely the cause of stalling of the federal permitting process.

Ioneer, owner of Rhyolite Ridge mine, has received both Class II Air Quality and Water Pollution Control permits from the state of Nevada. GBRW provided comments (gbrw.org/publications) on the Water Pollution Control including the following concerns:

- Long-term toxic mining pit lake (lagoon) required indefinite water treatment and the possibility of contaminating groundwater
- Effects of the regional springs due to groundwater pumping and generally incorrect hydrological analysis
- Inadequate groundwater monitoring
- Long-term management of the tailings dump that will contain residual acid and potentially result in long-term toxic drainage

Overall, GBRW did not support the permit, and the changes based on our comments were insufficient.

Despite the issuance of the state level permits, the Rhyolite Ridge project is far from receiving its federal permit. Watch for alerts on this proposed mine.

COMSTOCK RESIDENTS FIGHT ON, CMI CHANGES DIRECTION

By Susan Juetten

In January 2021, the Nevada Supreme Court ruled against the Comstock Residents Association (CRA). The group filed a suit against Lyon County Board of Supervisors and Comstock Mining Inc (CMI) for denying due process to local residents in a land use and zoning decision by the county. The court rejected the residents’ argument that the supervisors had a significant private interest in the mining company and should have abstained from the vote.

The group filed a suit against Lyon County Board of Supervisors and Comstock Mining Inc (CMI) for denying due process to local residents in a land use and zoning decision by the county. The court rejected the residents’ argument that the supervisors had a significant private interest in the mining company and should have abstained from the vote.

CMI and Lyon County then sued CRA and resident Joe McCarthy for over $250,000 for payment of fees under a state law which seeks to deter frivolous claims. Judge Robert Estes, former Lyon Court District Attorney, ruled in favor of CMI and Lyon County. CRA has now appealed this decision in the countersuit to the Nevada Supreme Court.

CMI wants to rebrand itself in what it calls a “transformation green shift to tactical decarbonization.” It has entered into joint ventures that it describes as “green”, including a mercury remediation project and a company producing ethanol.

As for mining in the Comstock, the company’s website mentions more exploration plans in Storey and Lyon counties.

Comstock Residents Association just launched a fundraising effort to pay legal fees.

To contribute please send a check made out to the Comstock Residents Association to Box 425, Silver City, NV 89428 or go online to use a debit or credit card: tinyurl.com/comstocklegal
A Tribute to Carrie Dann, Western Shoshone Land Defender

December 9, 1934 - January 1, 2021

By Mary Gibson

On the evening of January 1, 2021, Carrie Dann, Western Shoshone grandmother, rancher, and land defender, walked on to the spirit world. Carrie was born at the Dann Ranch in Crescent Valley, Eureka County, Nevada on December 9, 1934 where she spent most of her life.

She was dedicated to family, land and her traditional way of life. Carrie was the reflection of the strong, traditional matriarchs who raised her on the land her people have lived since time immemorial. Empowered by her matrilineal teachings and cultural knowledge, Carrie, and sister Mary (1923-2005) spent decades in US courts fighting for Western Shoshone land, treaty rights and Western Shoshone sovereignty. Both women were courageous warriors who risked their livelihood to stand up for what they believed in: culture, land and justice for the Western Shoshone and Indigenous people of the world.

Carrie awakened to the political strife between Western Shoshone and the United States in her early adult years when assimilation and colonization of Native lands and peoples was the United States’ priority. Carrie’s amplified voice for justice carried on for more than half her life as she and Mary defended Western Shoshone land rights.

Carrie’s stand to protect their land and life-ways began in 1973. Mary was approached by a Bureau of Land Management employee who notified her that the Dann cattle were grazing on public lands without the proper permit. Mary’s response was indicative of the Indigenous knowledge she possessed and lived by - if she were guilty of trespassing it would be on Paiute land rather than United States land. The Danns knew they were not trespassing because they lived and ranched in the heart of Western Shoshone unceded territory, as accorded by the 1863 Ruby Valley Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

After a series of court proceedings and several appeals, the United States ruled in 1985 that the Western Shoshone had lost title to the land. Consequently, the Dann’s lost the trespassing case. But that did not deter Carrie and Mary from elevating the injustices of the dispossession of Western Shoshone ancestral treaty lands. Holding the US government accountable for the violations of the 1863 Ruby Valley Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the sisters engaged in countless appeals and appeared before several international organizations and tribunals.

Carrie founded and directed the Western Shoshone Defense Project, which advocated for and asserted Western Shoshone land rights. She also engaged in grassroots organizing to fight against the destruction of Western Shoshone lands caused by the United States and mining industries occupying their homeland, Crescent Valley, and other areas in Newe Sogobia (Western Shoshone’s Earth Mother).

Carrie believe that a fundamental connection to the land is the foundation of Western Shoshone cultural identity. The transmission of cultural traditions from elder to child was important to Carrie; she encouraged Western Shoshone youth to know their history, know who they are and where they came from.

Carrie and Mary have been recognized and honored by many. Carrie was invited as a guest speaker to colleges, universities, conferences and platforms regarding Indigenous matters. In 1983, the sisters received the Wonder Woman Foundation’s Wonder Woman Award. In 1993, they received the Right Livelihood Award for their work towards advancing Western Shoshone land rights and Indigenous human rights. They have been featured in numerous journals, magazines, newspapers, TV appearances and film documentaries.

As a respected community elder, land defender and water protector, Carrie Dann’s voice will be missed but her words prevail: “Being a good ancestor would be taking care of the land, the water, the air, and the necessities of life so that the future generations will have something. That to me would be a good ancestor.”

REST IN POWER
The Greenwashing of European Mining

The update below was written for the Ecologist by our incredible partners Mirko Nikolic, Hannibal Rhoades, and Lynda Sullivan from the Yes to Life No to Mining (YLNM) Lithium group. YLNM Lithium is an international working group of individuals directly facing the effects of lithium extraction or are a part of organizations working alongside frontline communities in Chile, Serbia, Portugal, Nevada, California, Australia, Spain, and the UK.

Green mining or green lie?

Across Europe, new mining projects are being re-branded clean, green, and vital to climate action. The reality is very different.

Recently, the number of mining projects and massive expansion of areas under mining concession have surged on the Island of Ireland, Fennoscandia and across Europe.

27% of the Republic of Ireland and 25% of Northern Ireland are under mining concession, with a single company’s claims, Dalradian Resources, accounting for a total of 10% of Northern Ireland’s land area.

Meanwhile, Nordic nations have issued mining exploration permits covering millions of hectares of land, including the homeland of the Sámi Indigenous People. Up to 11% of Finland’s land area is under active exploration, reservation, or applications. In Norway and Sweden, 16,988 km² are currently under exploration.

A ‘green shift’? Rhetoric versus reality

Two new research dispatches from the Yes to Life, No to Mining Network (YLNM) explore how these nations - and the mining industry - are pursuing expansion by re-framing metal mining as a solution to climate change in order to facilitate domestic extraction of so-called ‘strategic’, ‘critical’ and ‘transition’ minerals required for renewable energy, transportation, military and digital technologies.

Norway was an early adopter of this framing, says Fennoscandian report co-author Svein Lund:

“In 2013 the Norwegian Government made strategy saying that mineral extraction should be increased and that it was acceptable to dump tailings into sea. The motivation for extraction was income for the state and municipalities.....talk of any ‘green shift’ [didn’t come until] three years later... Suddenly all mining companies and their allies became ‘green’...This was an immense PR trick.

These trends point to a critical conflict in the governance of mining across Europe. Governments have a duty to protect the environment and their people, for example, by regulating industry on their behalf. Yet they have also taken on roles as facilitators of harmful industries like mining, deregulating them in the hope of reaping foreign investment, meager royalties and taxes.

In both Fennoscandia and the Island of Ireland, the authors of YLNM’s new research reveal how the mining industry continues-despite so-called world class regulation - to disrupt vital ecosystems, mistreat and sideline communities, and violate indigenous rights.

The continuation of ‘business-as-usual’ can also be seen in the EU’s unwillingness to address the ongoing supply of raw materials from non-EU countries, particularly in the Global South. The European Commission has made numerous attempts to frame domestic mining in Europe as an alternative to relying on poorly-regulated mining in the South. Yet the same institution refuses to address its exploitative trade relations with so-called ‘third countries’ or to tackle Europe’s massive overconsumption of materials and energy to reduce extractive pressures globally.

Transformations

Opposition to mining in Europe is intensifying, as are calls for states to recognize that we cannot mine our way out of the climate crisis. Properly regulating the mining industry would be a start. Addressing historical and continued exploitation of the Global South is essential.

“Calls [to] Republic and Northern Ireland’s governments are growing, as are community-led examples of alternative pathways out of the climate crisis and towards justice and lasting peace among people and with the land. The message from communities at the frontlines of the Island’s new extractive frontiers is clear- respect our existence, or expect resistance,” says Lynda Sullivan, author of the “Island of Ireland” dispatch.

The most pressing question isn’t where new mining should happen, as European states and the European Union suggest. It is how we can immediately and dramatically reduce the need for new mines by tackling the ultimate drivers of this industry- overconsumption, inequity, and the pursuit of endless economic growth.

Read interactive stories: tinyurl.com/euromine

Download the full reports here:
tinyurl.com/eurogreenwash
GBRW Remembers Larson R. Bill

Larson R. Bill, Western Shoshone (“Newe”) and beloved husband, brother, father, grandpa, uncle and friend to many passed on suddenly and unexpectedly from non-COVID related causes on November 5, 2021. He was born on the Bill Family Ranch (South Fork – “Newe Divyeha”) in Elko County on August 9, 1948 to Percy Bill and Evelyn (Harney) Bill. Larson was a descendant of the Dosa Wihi’i (White Knife Band) and was very proud of his Native American ancestry.

Larson was loved by all who met him and had the most unique way of allowing you to laugh while introspecting your own self. While attending meetings at the United Nations, Larson coined the acronym L.A.W.S. – “land, air, water, sun/spirit” – the four sacred elements necessary to sustain life. At the time of his passing, Larson was the President of Great Basin Resource Watch Board of Directors and served over thirty years as an elected official with the Elko and South Fork Band Councils and the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone. Larson was instrumental in designing and implementing numerous infrastructure projects both on and off the reservation, including essential bridge and road work, and housing and community buildings.

Larson was drafted into the US Army and served from 1968 to 1971 during the Vietnam War. After returning from service, Larson went to college for electronics and worked in Reno and Las Vegas, returning to his home in the early 80’s to protect his family homestead on the South Fork Indian Reservation and to serve his community. He served on numerous other boards, including the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance, the Rural Nevada Development Corporation and as an officer of the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada. Later in life, Larson advocated for a different approach to the U.S. government, i.e. to bring issues to the table with unity between native people and respect for long-standing treaty rights in the face of what he referred to as “Corporate America”.

He spoke for Indigenous issues at the international level, and at forums in the U.S. Congress and the United Nations in New York City and Geneva. At home in Nevada, he served as a community organizer for the Western Shoshone Defense Project, an affiliate of the Seventh Generation Fund (www.7genfund.org). Larson was an adamant believer that “peace and friendship” by the United States should begin in its own backyard.

"Larson always was a grounding presence for Great Basin Resource Watch, who reminded us of what was important - L.A.W.S. as he put it. We have lost an important voice and presence, a hole that will never be filled," says John Hadder, GBRW executive director.

We at Great Basin are proud to have worked with this special man and will always appreciate his gentle council. Donations may be made to the Larson R. Bill LAWS Fund for Environmental Achievement through Great Basin Resource Watch at www.gbrw.org. Please click on “Donate Now” and note the donation is for the LAWS fund.

Thanks to Julie Cavanaugh-Bill for sharing many details of Larson’s life with us.