

C-Aquifer for Dine'  
Leupp, Arizona – Southwest Corner of the Navajo Nation

The fundamental law of the Navajo (Dine') people believes water to be one of the four sacred elements that was put forth by Diyin dine'e' (Deities) as a source of life. Water is part of prayer in the Hozhō ceremonies for healing. All human and all life on Nahasdzaan (Mother Earth) have a degree of water in their system. Water is precious to native people – it is life.

In the southwest area of the Navajo Nation, a group of grassroots community members joined forces in 2005 to oppose Peabody Coal and Navajo Nation Government's plan to drill for water on their land in Canyon Diablo. The water was to be drilled from the Coconino Aquifer from three existing wells and would be piped 75 miles north to Peabody Coal Mine on Black Mesa. At Peabody Coal Mine the water would be used to wash clean the crushed coal and the coal would be slurried 274 miles west to Mohave Generating Station near Laughlin, NV. Six Thousand (6,000) Acre Feet of water would be used (per year) to slurry coal, so the State of California could have electrical power for their cities.

One nice warm day in November, 2005, Loretia Black was looking after her cattle when she noticed several trucks with survey equipment parked around the Well near her homestead. She approached the people and asked what they were doing there. The survey crew told her they were going to do Archeological Survey around the three wells for C-Aquifer drilling – that the survey was approved by the Navajo Nation. She told them that land they are on is her grazing land and ordered them off her land as soon as possible. Although the crew resisted, Loretia stood her ground and the survey crew left the area. That was the first encounter and the first knowledge of the Navajo Nation Government plan to drill in Canyon Diablo.

There are approximately 50 families living on east and west side of Canyon Diablo. They demanded explanation from the Leupp Chapter and found the chapter had approved an archeological survey. The east Canyon Diablo families would be directly impacted, so they asked for help from Dine' CARE to help them organize against the water drilling in their community. The Dine' CARE main office is only 20 miles east of Leupp (Canyon Diablo), AZ.

The communities of East and West Canyon Diablo do not have electricity or running water. They live close to I-40 across the railroad tracks. Their access road to I-40 was closed off due to the chapters direction, which they resented. They now have to travel the poor roads leading out to the main community of Leupp, which is several miles away. There are three wind mills where they water their livestock and get their drinking water. The families have lived in this remote area of the reservation all their lives and their families before them. They have livestock and live off the land. They feel their Chapter has over looked their need for good roads, electricity and running water.

After organizing, with selection of officers and other development of committees, the organization came to be known as C-Aquifer for Dine'. They opposed the drilling of C-Aquifer for coal slurry with resolutions to the Navajo chapters of Western and Chinle Agencies of the Navajo Nation government. They helped sponsor a "Dine' Bikeyah Water Forum" in May, 2006. They set up protest marches to the Navajo Nation Council meetings in Window Rock and networked with other organizations throughout the Navajo Nation. They raised funds selling Mutton Stew and Fry Bread at the Flea market in Leupp, AZ. They went in force to meetings to do presentations to tell their story. C-Aquifer for Dine' said they do not want to give Navajo water away to corporations, but develop the water here on their land by put running water into every Hogan.

In late 2006 Peabody and Salt River Project, the main share holders of Peabody Coal's plan to drill for C-Aquifer fell apart. California Edison couldn't keep the door open to Mohave Generating Station, so they decided to close the plant due to high cost of installation of scrubbers to off-set their excessive air pollution. Several environmental organizations had filed a lawsuit against Mohave for their air pollution in 2002 and won the lawsuit ordering Mohave to clean-up their air pollution by 2005.

C-Aquifer for Dine' began to relax, but that was short lived when they found out the Navajo Nation Executive Branch, President Shirley and his Attorney General, had developed a Navajo water plan and wanted it approved by the Navajo Nation Council. The water plan was done in secret, with negotiations behind closed doors with Peabody, Salt River Project and Los Angeles Utilities to re-open Mohave Generating Station. C-Aquifer for Dine' went to the media and started a media war to unveil the Navajo Nation's plan to the public. The plan to reopen Mohave died and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Peabody was put on hold, until December 06, when Office of Surface Mining of Denver, CO said they will still do the hearings.

C-Aquifer for Dine' resume their public education against the EIS. They did radio shows from KTNN Navajo radio station. They organized with the Hopi Traditionalists and did radio shows together and made sure they were at the public hearings throughout the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation Government chucked the re-opening of Mohave, but they have revived a water plan that is about 10 years old to tap onto the Colorado River. In their plan they added C-Aquifer and Little Colorado River. The Water Commission of the Navajo Nation Council did community education to enforce their water plan, which C-Aquifer for Dine' and other grassroots organizations are opposed to. The plan will use Colorado River and C-Aquifer to run a pipeline from Page, AZ area to Flagstaff, AZ and another pipeline from Canyon Diablo to Flagstaff, AZ. The Navajo Nation believes that if Coconino Aquifer is not used by the Navajo Nation, they will lose rights to it. The grassroots argument is with their ancestral and inherent holdings to the land within the Four Sacred Mountains, they also have inherent rights to the water. The four water ways surrounding Navajo land, including Colorado River, was identified and named by the Dieties of the Dine' to be a boundary of their sacred lands. To this day and age, the

Dine' rightly practice their ways and have a claim to these boundaries as put forth of their ancestors.

In the Navajo Nation Water Plan there is also a proposed water agreement with the city of Flagstaff. Flagstaff wants a share of the Navajo C-Aquifer and the Navajo Nation is ready to negotiate. The grassroots organizations say that is not the right thing to do for the Navajo Nation at this time. The Southwest area of the Navajo Nation and Western Navajo area have been in a state of severe drought for the past 20 years. Over half of the Navajo people living in those areas do not have running water in their homes. At a time when Climate Change is upon us and the way of life of the Dine' is threatened by consistent drought is no time to be giving precious water away to cities such as Flagstaff who have access to abundance of water from the San Francisco Peak. C-Aquifer for Dine' want each Navajo home to get running water first before any agreements are considered by the Navajo Nation Government with out side sources.