

Protecting Sacred Sites-Mount Taylor



Mt. Taylor is situated in northwestern New Mexico, formerly known as the Grants Mineral Belt. This part of New Mexico was devastated by uranium mining from the 1940's to 1980's.

Part of the legacy of past uranium mining is that the air (breath), soil (plants), and water (springs, streams) are polluted and can never be returned to their original state before mining. In 2009, the National Historic Trust listed Mt. Taylor as one of 11 most endangered historic places in the US.

The area now harbors 97 abandoned uranium mines and 5 former uranium mills. Currently two new uranium mines are being proposed: the Roca Honda mine, owned by Roca Honda Resources (RHR), LLC, and the La Jara Mesa Mine, owned by Laramide Mine. Additionally, Rio Grande Resources has proposed the reopening of the Mt. Taylor mine.

Proposed mining in all three of these areas will adversely impact the Mt. Taylor Traditional Cultural Property. Under the leadership of the affected indigenous nations, in 1990 Mount Taylor was permanently listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties, due to its significance to Laguna and Acoma Pueblos and many other native nations in New Mexico.

These indigenous nations have a spiritual relationship to Mt. Taylor, with over 1,000 identified archeological sites that have been significant since prehistoric times. Its shrines, springs and other landscape features are important for religious pilgrimages and ceremonies today.

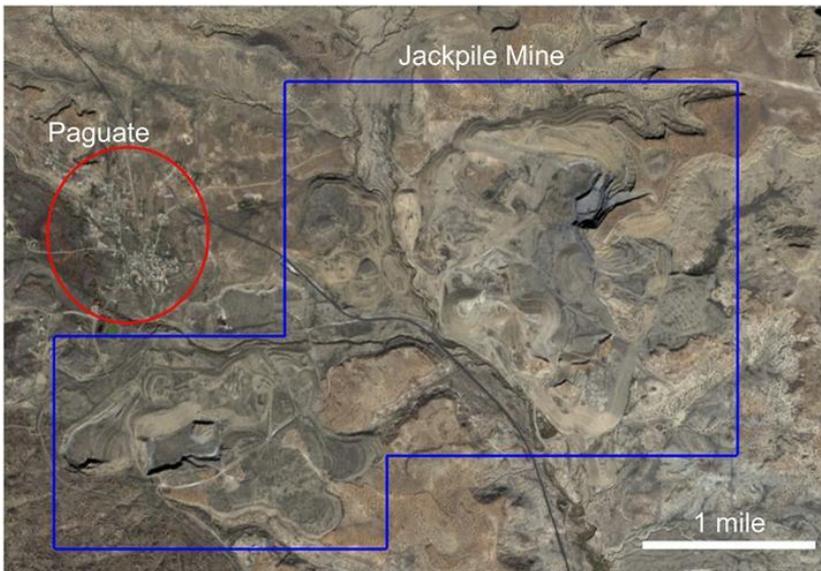
Laguna Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment

Founded in 1993, the LACSE is a non-profit, grassroots environmental organization of concerned tribal members and residents of Laguna and Acoma pueblos working in unity to empower their communities on the impacts of resource development, especially uranium mining, on human and cultural life. This includes the protection of sacred cultural sites and areas, including Mt. Taylor, a mountain sacred to Laguna and Acoma as well as other Indigenous peoples of New Mexico.

LACSE's work on nuclear fuel cycle issues arises from its members' individual and collective experience with uranium mining in their own communities. LACSE's members worked or lived next to the mammoth open-pit Jackpile Uranium Mine that operated on Laguna Pueblo and at the many underground mines in the Ambrosia Lake area near Milan. Uranium development brought adverse health effects and social change to the pueblos, challenging cultural values and traditional practices of the Laguna and Acoma people.

LACSE's work to protect sacred cultural sites includes presenting documentation in numerous domestic and international forums about disregard by the United States of its laws and executive orders which protect "Sacred Places and Related Rights" These forums include the United States Congress, the New Mexico Legislature, the United Nations and the Organization of American States.





JACKPILE MINE LEGACY

Jackpile was once the world's largest open pit uranium mine, located on the Pueblo of Laguna near the village of Paguate

Anaconda Minerals Company operated the 7,868-acre site from 1953 to 1982, leaving open pits, waste dumps, and ore stockpiles. Contaminants found at the site include uranium, arsenic, barium, chromium, and lead.

An EPA assessment in 2007 determined additional remediation was necessary. Jackpile was declared a Superfund site in 2012.

The nearby Rio Paguate and Paguate Reservoir have shown elevated levels of isotopic uranium, which could affect cultural and ceremonial uses of these water bodies. (<http://www.wise-uranium.org/udusanm.html#JACKPI>)

LAGUNA ACOMA COALITION FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT GOALS

- Community Education for Laguna and Acoma members and residents
- Community empowerment in addressing legacy issues affecting health and the environment

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Paguate Village resident Larry Lente discusses mine reclamation with NIEHS director Lynda Birnbaum, March 2013.