

Protecting Sacred Sites-Mount Taylor



Tsibiina (Laguna)/ Kaweshtima (Acoma) known as Mt. Taylor in English is situated in northwestern New Mexico in an area known as the Grants Mineral Belt/ Grants Mining District. In 2009, the National Historic Trust listed Tsibiina / Kaweshtima as one of 11 most endangered historic places in the U.S.

And for good reason: In many places of the Grants Mineral Belt, including around Tsibiina / Kaweshtima, the land and water are so polluted by uranium wastes that they may never be returned to their original state.

The area now harbors 97 abandoned uranium mines and 5 former uranium mills, and virtually all of them are still in need of remediation nearly 60 years after most of them closed.

Despite this legacy, three new uranium mines are being proposed in the area around Tsibiina / Kaweshtima; Roca Honda (underground) Mine, owned by Roca Honda Resources (RHR), LLC, the La Jara Mesa Mine, owned by Laramide Mining of Canada; and Grants Precision ISR, owned by Rio Grande Resources. These three projects are on the Trump Administration's Fast 41 list, meaning they each will have an expedited federal review. Rio Grande Resources' mine is now undergoing state-ordered reclamation.

Under the leadership of the affected Indigenous nations, Tsibiina / Kaweshtima was permanently listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties in 1990, due to its significance to Laguna and Acoma Pueblos and many other native nations in New Mexico. In 2008, this significance was recognized by the establishment of the Mt. Taylor Traditional Cultural Property (TCP)

Many Indigenous nations have a spiritual relationship to Tsibiina / Kaweshtima, with more than 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.

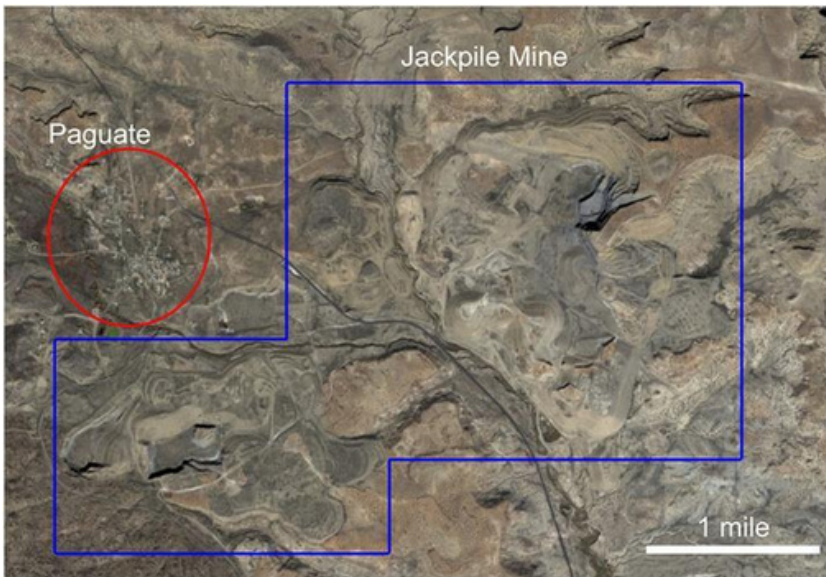
Laguna Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment

Founded in 1993, 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. LACSE is a member of the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment (MASE), a coalition of uranium impacted communities.

LACSE's work to protect sacred cultural sites includes presenting documentation in numerous domestic and international forums about the disregard by the United States of its laws and executive orders that 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.

LACSE works on nuclear fuel chain concerns that arise 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 from 1952 to 1982 and at the many underground mines in the Ambrosia Lake area, west of the Village of San Mateo. Uranium development brought adverse health effects and social change to the pueblos, negatively impacting the cultural values and traditional practices of the Laguna and Acoma people.





Laguna Acoma Coalition for a Safe Environment

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

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JACKPILE MINE LEGACY

The Jackpile-Paguete Uranium Mine, located on the Pueblo of Laguna next to the Village of Paguate, was once the world's largest open pit uranium mine. Anaconda Minerals Company operated the 7,868-acre site from 1952 to 1982, leaving open pits, waste dumps, and ore stockpiles. Contaminants found at the site include uranium, arsenic, barium, chromium, lead, and vanadium.

Initial reclamation of the mine between 1989 and 1995 was conducted by the Pueblo of Laguna with funds provided by Anaconda in the mid-1980s. An EPA assessment in 2007 determined additional remediation was necessary. EPA added the Jackpile Mine to its Superfund National Priorities List in 2012.

The Rio Paguate starts on Tsibiina / Kaweshtima and provides high-quality mountain water to Paguate Lake and the irrigated croplands west of the village. But the stream picks up high levels of uranium, radium, arsenic and other metals as it flows through the mine site before emptying behind Mesita Dam. Research has identified elevated levels of uranium and radium in the water and sediments of Paguate Reservoir. This contamination may affect wildlife that use the wetlands and cultural and ceremonial uses of these water bodies.



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