

Protesters vow to stop Calpine Energy Corporation's plans to destroy the Sacred Medicine Lake Highlands and other Native cultural and natural places

Written by Mark LeBeau, M.S.

Edited by Organizers of the Protest

The protest to protect the sacred Medicine Lake Highlands and other vitally important Native cultural and natural places at Calpine energy headquarters on 1/27/06 in San Jose, CA, was very successful. Over 250 Native and non-Native people who care about preserving such places participated in the demonstration and registered their support in a highly visible, assertive and nonviolent way. Many protestors marched, others drove, to Calpine headquarters and displayed handwritten signs demanding that energy companies and other polluters cease and desist all projects and activities that adversely effect Native cultural and natural places.

Calpine has federal energy leases that cover eight square miles in the sacred Highlands and state government support to build a monolithic power plant in this natural place. The power plant would annually produce tons of toxic hydrogen sulfide gas and arsenic and mercury. Drilling in the sacred Highlands would reach depths of nine thousand feet. The important cultural and natural area where Native peoples have retreated since time immemorial to gather medicine and strength and receive healing would be cut down to make space to house toxic slump ponds, roads, pipelines and cooling towers. This project also threatens the underlying aquifer which is California's largest spring system. The sacred Highlands waters flow into the Fall River, then joins the Pit River and winds its way into the Sacramento River. Native peoples, homeowners, ranchers, fishing enthusiasts, environmentalists and other concerned citizens and towns have opposed this devastating project since it was first unveiled in the 1980s. Ironically, the geothermal energy extracted would be peddled as "green energy", creating a false image of health and safety.

Upon arriving at Calpine headquarters, dubbed Ground Zero, many protestors picketed on the sidewalk outside of the building, while participating in call and response cadences orchestrated by protest leaders using the bull horn, loudly saying such phrases as: "hey hey, ho ho, Calpine Energy's got to go" and "ensure the protection of Medicine Lake!" Other protestors handed out informational leaflets to motorists driving and people walking by and got people to sign a letter to Calpine stakeholders opposing the company's proposed energy projects. A youth group from San Francisco that advocates non-violent action for positive change donated their talents to the protest and shared many high-energy and powered Tribal-Afro-Cuban drum beats and dances with the crowd.

Media reporters were also at Ground Zero and interviewed many Native sacred sites protection leaders who spoke eloquently of why we were all there. In fact, one Nation, the Redding Rancheria hand delivered their tribal resolution stating their opposition to the proposed geothermal development in the sacred Highlands and support to expand the traditional cultural district in this area. During this time, Native leaders and their supporters announced their plan for a future demonstration to nonviolently but directly resist any attempt at construction of the power plant in the sacred Highlands. Bundles of Native purification medicine were ignited and smoldered in the open area, curled through the crowd and around the building, and reached like sacred fingers into the midday sky. Calpine would not come out to face the music or engage in public debate on the issues before the media and instead put its tail between its legs and reportedly issued a lock-down of its upstairs headquarters.

Upon completion of the gathering, Radley Davis, Mark LeBeau and Morning Star Gali Co-Chaired a post-protest meeting at a local community center and the attendees discussed the guidelines and plans for future protests, demonstrations and other advocacy efforts. The meeting also served to widen the already extensive network of sacred sites protection advocates. Clearly, the protest and the related events were well organized and achieved the intended results.

Special acknowledgment to the following protest organizers for their unyielding commitment to make the event a tremendous success: Radley Davis, LeBeau Family, Morning Star Gali, James Hayward, Jonathon Freeman, Miki'ala Catalfano, Chris Peters, Jimbo Simmons and Bradley Angel.

Special acknowledgment to the financial sponsors of the protest: International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), Redding Rancheria, Seventh Generation Fund (SGF), Sonny-James Native Arts, Greenaction for Health & Environmental Justice (Greenaction), James Hayward, Radley Davis, LeBeau Family and all who bought a protest t-shirt.

Special thanks to the organizational supporters of the protest: Indian People Organizing for Change, Vallejo Inter-tribal Council, Native American Sisterhood Alliance of Mills College, Advocates for the Protection of Sacred Sites, Da'hu La'h As Sacred Sites Defense, SGF, Greenaction, IITC, IEN, Citizens of the Pitt River Nation, Tierra Viva of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Youth United for Community Action, CA Communities Against Toxics, Redding Rancheria and Pit River Tribe.

And very special thanks to all who attended and those who could not, but sent their blessings. Remember, the battle is not over and we will be calling on each other very soon for further assistance. For more information on the protest and upcoming advocacy efforts, phone 530-917-6064 or 916-801-4422.

The four photos below were taken at the protest against Calpine Energy Company to save the sacred Medicine Lake Highlands & other Native cultural places and belong to Jonathon Freeman.

