

# Saying No to Desert Rock

Dailan J. Long

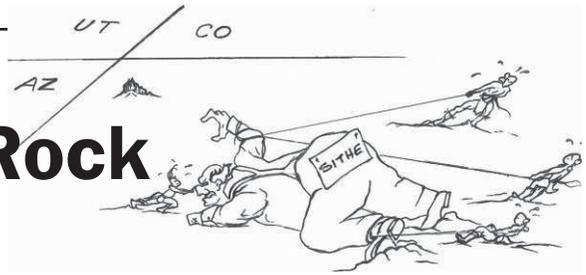
I doubt that most citizens are knowledgeable about how their televisions, air conditioners, and other electric appliances cause serious damage to communities where coal, oil, and gas are abundant. Some people's land and health are sacrificed so that others can switch on a lightbulb; thus, energy production is not an innocent endeavor. I am a Native American activist fighting a proposed coal-fired power plant called the Desert Rock Energy Project. I come from a rural Navajo community where there are already two dirty coal-fired power plants, 125 million tons of coal combustion waste, contaminated water, and the dirtiest air in the U.S.

In 2003, Sithe Global Power and Diné Power Authority proposed the 1,500-megawatt Desert Rock Energy Project to support the Navajo Nation's economic development. Located in the Four Corners region of the United States (New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona), the Navajo Nation includes over 200,000 tribal members – many without jobs and surviving on inadequate healthcare. The amount of coal that we have in our lands is enormous, and in 1923, an energy company started controlling our tribal government. Since then, our lands have been ravaged by all kinds of industries: oil, gas, coal, uranium, and coal. Our people have

gotten sick and many of our grandmothers and grandfathers are sick with cancer and respiratory diseases. We are losing the carriers of a culture that has survived since the dawn of life.

In the Navajo lifeway, one must live in balance and harmony with the Earth and treat one another with respect. "Air" in Navajo means "breath" and "spirit." When a person prays, his breath is spirit and the air must be pure so that the spirits may hear his or her words. It must not be contaminated by toxic substances from power plant smoke stacks. Water is also sacred because wherever it flows, life grows. After it rains, for example, plants sprout and flowers flourish. Animals feed and grow healthy in a healthy environment. When coal is mined and then burned for electricity, the toxic fumes that are left behind pollute the environment and destroy the delicate balance of all life forms.

I oppose Desert Rock because the large coal complex in and around my community impacts the health of all life forms. The red and purple sunsets are hazy with smoke. The blue sky is yellow with toxic clouds. The land, once mined, does not come back. Despite the large mining company digging up our homes, relocating my grandparents, and digging up our burial grounds, we have



Navajo elder Luci A. Willie sits at a camp fire during a direct action at the proposed Desert Rock site in December 2006. "This is a crisis situation," she said. "I am not moving anywhere, no matter how much they harass me."



Luci A. Willie speaks to those who camped with her during the direct action. Willie and Sarah White, founders of the Desert Rock resistance, mobilized the community by visiting homes and getting signatures from tribal members.

no electricity and no running water. Money cannot replace my ancestral roots, and I will not allow my community to be sacrificed for the production of cheap electricity.

There are better ways to make energy. I support solar development because the Sun is a deity in my culture; I support wind farms because wind is the breath of life. Renewable energy provides more jobs for my people, cheaper electricity, and more revenue for my tribe; there is no need for coal development. Coal is like a drug addiction, and renewable energy is like a breath of fresh air.

There is a large movement of people in the United States demanding *green energy* to battle global warming. Climate change is part of why I resist Desert Rock but I advocate for renewable energy because I am a young person, the face of a new generation that will remember my cultural roots because of land preservation. My people remain in the same place where we were born. "Moving your home" does not exist in the thinking of Native Americans. I will live where I am from. Generations from now, the grandchildren

will remember the warriors of today: the activists working against global warming and protecting the land for the future. My prayers of tonight will be for the youth of tomorrow, the five-fingered clan. *Hozhó Nashasdlí*. In Beauty once again.

Born and raised on the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, Dailan J. Long works with Diné Citizens Against Ruining our Environment (Diné CARE), which opposes Desert Rock. Long is entrusted by local elders to nurture a healthy environment and propose renewable energy alternatives for a healthy Navajo future.



Dailan J. Long (left) meets with community members to plan their opposition to Desert Rock, May 2008.

