

# EAGLE ROCK TRADING POST

## NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN JEWELRY-SOUTHWEST JEWELRY & DECOR

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### AMERICA'S SECRET CHERNOBYL

#### **FACT SHEET**

#### **Uranium Mining and Nuclear Pollution in the Upper Midwest:**

##### **America's Secret Chernobyl**

- 1.** Uranium mining in South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota began in the middle of the 1960s. World War II, which ended with the nuclear bomb, introduced the use of nuclear energy for the production of electricity and caused the price of uranium to rise. As the economy of the Midwestern states depends primarily on agriculture, when uranium was discovered in the region, many get-rich-quick schemes were adopted. Not only were large mining companies pushing off the tops of bluffs and buttes, but small individual ranchers were also digging in their pastures for the radioactive metal. Mining occurred on both public and private land, although the Great Sioux Nation still maintains a claim to the area through the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868.
- 2.** In northwestern South Dakota, for example, the Cave Hills area is managed by the US Forest Service. The area currently contains 89 abandoned open-pit uranium mines. Studies by the USFS show that one mine alone has 1400 mR/hr of exposed radiation, a level of radiation that is 120,000 times higher than normal background of 100 mR/yr. There are no warning signs posted for the general public anywhere near this site! It is estimated that more than 1,000 open-pit uranium mines and prospects can be found in the four state region from a map developed by the US Forest Service.
- 3.** The water runoff from the Cave Hills abandoned uranium mines empties into the Grand River which flows through the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Three villages are located on the Grand River and their residents have used the water for drinking and other domestic purposes for generations. One village still uses the water for drinking and domestic purposes. The water runoff from the Slim Buttes abandoned uranium mines empty into the Morreau River which flows through the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation. Four villages are located on the Morreau River; however no data is currently available about their use of the Morreau River water. Both of these rivers empty into the Missouri River which empties into the Mississippi River.
- 4.** The following agencies are aware of these abandoned uranium mines and prospects: US Forest Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Bureau of Land Management, SD Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the US Indian Health Service. Only after public concern about these mines was raised two years ago did the USFS and the EPA pay for a study of one mine this year, 2006.
- 5.** In southwestern South Dakota, the southern Black Hills also contain many abandoned uranium mines. Nuclear radiation near Edgemont, SD, has already polluted the underground water of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation according to a study completed in 1980 by Women of All Red Nations. The US Air Force also used small nuclear power plants in their remote radar stations and missile silos which number in the hundreds in this four State region. No data is available on the current status or disposal of these small nuclear power sources.

**6.** More than 7,000 exploration holes for uranium have been drilled in the southwestern and northwestern Black Hills. More are being planned in Wyoming. These holes go to depths of 800 feet. The exploratory process itself allows radioactive pollutants to contaminate underground water sources. South Dakota currently has no regulations for In Situ Leach mining of uranium.

**7.** In Wyoming, hundreds of abandoned open-pit uranium mines and prospects can be found in or near the coal in the Powder River Basin. Yet plans are being made to ship more of that coal to power plants in the Eastern part of the United States. Radioactive dust and particles will be released into the air at the power plants as well as locally in the strip mining process. Federal tax dollars totaling more than \$2.3 billion dollars as a loan are planned to be given to a private business, the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad, to increase the amount of coal hauled to the power plants. Two other railroads currently haul coal out of this area.

**8.** In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed a secret Executive Order declaring this four State region to be a 'National Sacrifice Area' for the mining and production of uranium and nuclear energy. This is the same area of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty territory, the final home of the Great Sioux Nation.

### **Summary**

This Fact Sheet regarding the past uranium mining and small underground nuclear power plants in the Upper Midwest region should give cause for alarm to all thinking people in the United States. This is the area that has been called "the Bread Basket of the World." It is for this reason that we are bringing this issue to your attention. For more than forty years, the people of South Dakota and beyond have been subjected to radioactive polluted dust and water runoff from the hundreds of abandoned open pit uranium mines, processing sites, underground nuclear power stations, and waste dumps. Pollution does not stop at State boundaries so these places generating radioactive pollution to the air and water are also impacting the rest of the United States. Coal tainted with uranium and radiation that has gone and is going to Eastern power plants adds to the total amount of radioactive pollution. There needs to be a concerted effort to determine the extent of the radioactive pollution in the environment, and the health damage that has been and is currently being inflicted upon the people of the United States.

It is imperative that a federal bill be passed in Congress appropriating enough funds for the cleanup of ALL the abandoned uranium mines in this four State region. This harmful situation must not be placed on the end of the Superfund list of hazardous sites to be addressed in twenty years. The health of the nation is threatened. The cleanup of all of these mines and underground sites must occur now! Those responsible for this disaster must face the consequences, but the cleanup and health concerns of the nation need to be addressed first. We hope you will consider our request for concerted actions to be taken at the national level regarding these grave concerns. This problem of radiation pollution spreading throughout the United States has been allowed to quietly continue for much too long.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

**1.** Contact your Congressional Representative and Senators by phone (202) 224-3121, through the mail, and email. Ask that they consider sponsoring a bill for the cleanup of all the abandoned uranium mines and prospects, and underground nuclear sites in the Upper Midwest Region of South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming.

**2.** Also ask your Congressional Representatives and Senators to support the Expansion of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) to include also those harmed by abandoned uranium mines and prospects in the Upper Midwest Region.

**3.** Include the fact that federal tax dollars should not be used to help a private railroad haul potentially radioactive coal to Central and Eastern power plants. Encourage your Senators and Representatives to tell the Federal Railroad Administration not to give a loan to the DM&E Railroad.

Thank you

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UPDATE WARNING

## **Radiation Warning Signs Placed on Cheyenne River**

### **SOUTH DAKOTA**

*by Shelley Bluejay Pierce, Native American Times Correspondent 7/29/2007*

Radiation warning signs were posted on Wednesday, July 18, 2007 in the small town of Red Shirt, South Dakota which lies on the northwest corner of the Pine Ridge Reservation. Several of these signs were placed warning people of the high nuclear radiation levels found in the Cheyenne River.

Several weeks ago Everitt Poor Thunder, a spiritual and community leader in Red Shirt, asked Defenders of the Black Hills, an environmental organization, whether the Cheyenne River water could be used to irrigate a community garden. A local well could not be used as it was found to be radioactive and warning signs surround that structure. The water well taps into the Inyan Kara aquifer that also contains the Lakota and Fall River formations, making up an extremely large aquifer of water supplies for many regions.

Residents of Red Shirt occupy a village site that is thousands of years old to the Oglala Tetuwan (Sioux) people. Many have lived here all of their lives, growing gardens with water taken from the Cheyenne River and fishing for catfish, bass, and turtles. In the summer months, the river is used for swimming and other recreational pursuits.

A water sample taken from the Cheyenne River was sent to a laboratory and the results revealed levels of alpha radiation above the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Maximum Contaminant Level. Alpha radiation causes harm when ingested hence the warning signs were placed to warn people of the dangers in the Cheyenne River.

The portion of the Cheyenne River Basin that lies in southwestern South Dakota drains about 16,500 square miles within the boundaries of the state. The area in this basin includes part of the Black Hills and Badlands, rangeland, irrigated cropland, and mining areas. After traversing the western half of the state from southwest to northeast, the Cheyenne River flows into Lake Oahe, a reservoir on the Missouri River.

Previous efforts remove the radiation in the water at Red Shirt have been unsuccessful. Drinking water is piped in, or residents must drive 25 miles to the little town of Hermosa to buy water. The Cheyenne River has dried up

approximately one mile from Red Shirt and tests of the river bottom soil by Defenders of the Black Hills are pending. Initial tests using a Geiger counter revealed more than double the amount of normal background elevations for radiation.

South Dakota news reports recently referred to a DENR report and stated that uranium is naturally occurring in that area which is said to account for the radiation levels in the water.

"If that was the case, there would not have been villages there for thousands of years. There would have been no fish or any aquatic life previously in this river. We sampled the river with nets for aquatic life and found only 2 crayfish and about 10 minnows in more than 100 yards of the river. In essence, it's a dead river. There are two endangered species that use this River: the Sturgeon chubb, a small fish, and the Bald Eagle," explained Charmaine White Face, founder and Coordinator of Defenders of the Black Hills.

According to published information in the The 2006 South Dakota Integrated Report For Surface Water Quality Assessment the Cheyenne River water quality continues to be generally poor. The lower Cheyenne drainage, in general, contains a high percentage of erodible cropland and rangeland in west central South Dakota. Historical mining records for the state show more than 4,000 exploratory uranium mining holes, some large enough for a man to fall into, in the southwestern Black Hills with an additional 3,000 holes just 10 miles west of the town of Belle Fourche, SD. These mining holes go to depths of 600 feet.

At a meeting for the Defenders of the Black Hills on Feb 26th 2005, discussions centered on the radiation levels in some areas reported at a staggering 1,400 times higher than the ordinary background radiation on the Grand River in the Cave Hills and the adverse affects to the villages on the Standing Rock Indian Reservations. Also discussed was the high proportion of cancer related illnesses and birth defects especially in the small community of Rock Creek.

"There are also hundreds of abandoned uranium mines in Wyoming whose runoff comes down the Cheyenne River, and also 29 abandoned mines in the southwestern Black Hills, all upstream of Red Shirt Village. One of the largest open-pit abandoned uranium mines in the southern Black Hills is a square mile and its runoff goes into the Cheyenne River," explained Charmaine White Face.

Most recently, a Canadian mining company, Powertech, began drilling uranium exploratory wells in the Dewey Burdock area northwest of Edgemont. Defenders of the Black Hills battled in court against the drilling permit allowing Powertech to drill 155 more exploratory wells at depths of 500-600 feet in the southwestern Black Hills but the Courts allowed the drilling after denying the appeal. Powertech currently has 4,000 uncapped, and unmarked uranium exploratory wells drilled previously. The mining company plans on doing In Situ Recovery (ISR) of uranium from the Lakota and Fall River aquifers. In Situ Recovery was formerly known as In Situ Leach (ISL) mining.

During the ISR process, a solution to dissolve the uranium is poured down the wells and the dissolved uranium brought back up to the surface. The uranium is separated from the remaining radioactive waste solution that is then reinjected into the aquifer after being held in waste ponds on the surface.

According to Powertech's mining application, each exploratory drill hole "will have a small excavated mud pit that will be approximately 12 feet by 5 feet" and 10 feet deep.

Among the concerns of the environmental groups are the possibility of overflow from the mud pits with the sudden rain showers that occur in the Black Hills. One of the aquifers empties directly into the Cheyenne River and is used by many ranchers to water their livestock. Among the deeper aquifers of concern is the Madison that provides water for many western South Dakota communities.

“A list of uranium mining facts provided online by our organization, Defenders of the Black Hills, reveals a long history of abuses regarding uranium and coal mining in the Upper Midwest region. In an area of the USA that has been called “the Bread Basket of the World,” more than forty years of mining have released radioactive polluted dust and water runoff from the hundreds of abandoned open pit uranium mines, processing sites, underground nuclear power stations, and waste dumps. Our grain supplies and our livestock production in this area have used the water and have been exposed to the remainders of this mining. We may be seeing global affects, not just localized affects, to the years of uranium mining” concluded Charmaine White Face.



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