

# Uranium mining on reservation has tragic effects

By PHIL GARBER  
MANAGING EDITOR

## >>RELATED EDITORIAL

**Everyone should be concerned with uranium mining in New Mexico.** Please see the editorial on page 6.

**WASHINGTON TWP.** - It's a long way from Long Valley to the Navajo Nation reservation in New Mexico but the tragic lessons about the dangers of nuclear power unfolding there are universally relevant.

Those lessons are dramatically depicted in the new documentary film "Woven Ways" directed and written by Linda Helm Krapf, the founder of the former Myhelan Cultural Arts Center in Long Valley.

After five years in production, the film is completed and will be showing at film festivals around the nation. Krapf also has been showing her film to small groups of supporters, most recently on Feb. 24 at the Drakestown Road home of Julie McCormick and Phil Hunt and on Feb. 17 at Fordyce Studios in Long Valley.

The film tells the story partly through the lives of the Navajo weavers whose culture is intertwined with their sheep herds and how both the sheep and the weavers' lives have been devastated by past uranium and coal mining.

It shows how decades of mining have resulted in lasting contamination of water supplies and the subsequent severe health effects on people from the mining. It also focuses on current efforts to block plans for new, massive uranium mining on the reservation.

### Global Repercussions

"Our energy problems are global problems," said Helm Krapf of Sergeantsville. "The Navajos are facing the worst repercussions of that problem and hold the promise for a remedy to that problem."

Helm Krapf said uranium to be mined at the reservation is extremely high quality and would likely be exported to power plants around the nation. She said 27 new nuclear power plants are currently under review by

the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

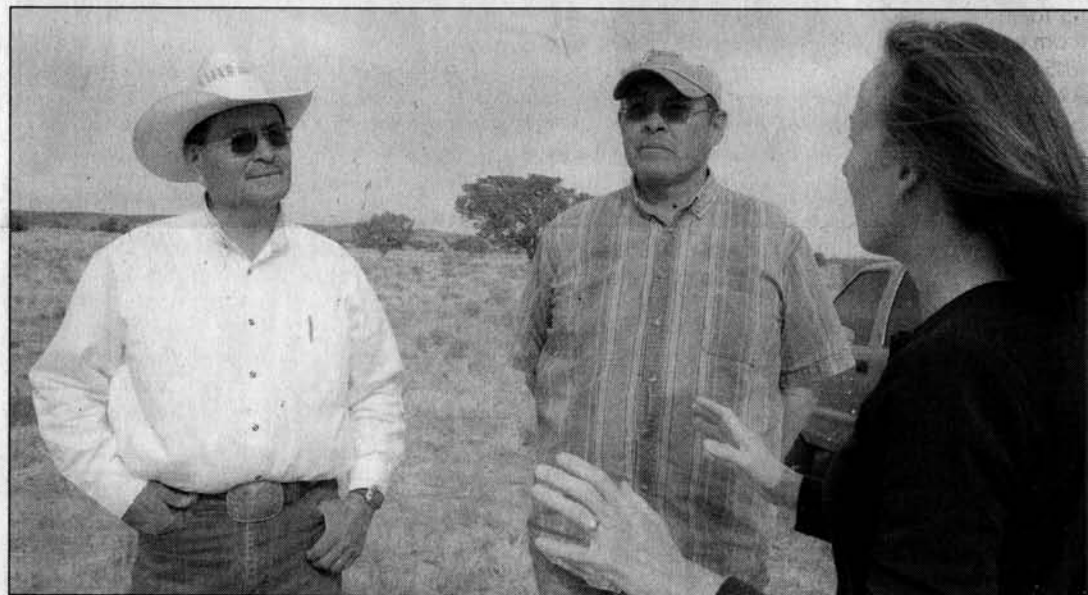
"I hope the film gives people one more good reason to abandon the idea of nuclear power plants," Helm Krapf said.

According to the film, decades of uranium mining on Native Land is directly responsible for thousands of cancer deaths among Navajo miners, and has contaminated the land, air, and water for hundreds of square miles.

Two new uranium mining projects have been slated for the Navajo communities of Crownpoint and Church Rock, N.M.

Hydro Resources, Inc. (HRI), the New Mexico subsidiary of a Dallas-based uranium company, first proposed the mining in a license application to U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 1988. HRI received final NRC approvals last year but construction has not started.

The proposed mining involves drilling and operating hundreds of injection and production wells, known as in-situ leach (ISL) uranium mining. In the past, such drilling has caused permanent contamination of the wells.



Filmmaker Linda Helm Krapf is with Navajo activists fighting to keep uranium mining off Navajo territory, Mitchell Capitan, left, the founder of Eastern Navajo Dine Against Uranium Mining (ENDAUM) and Larry King, who is featured in Helm Krapf's film, "Woven Ways."

The film says that hydrologists and geologists have determined that toxins from in-situ leach uranium mining at the two sites will infiltrate the water supply within seven years, leaving 15,000 Navajos with no clean source of drinking water.

Helm Krapf said Exxon Mobile drilled a series of seven test wells in mining areas on the reservation 16 years ago and determined it could not return the water to safe levels. Those wells have since been capped.

Helm Krapf said the new, proposed wells would have the same irrevocable effect on the water.

"This is what this whole movement is about," Helm Krapf said. "We are all painfully aware that there is no good way of storing the nuclear waste, that accidents happen and that there is a potential for terrorist attacks on nuclear plants. Now, we know you can't get the uranium out of the

ground without harming people. It's a dirty little secret."

The Navajo Nation has voted against permitting the uranium mining but the proposal still won NRC permission.

"The Navajo people don't feel secure in the knowledge that the government has done all it can to stop the mining," Helm Krapf said. "The federal government very much wants this to go ahead."

Helm Krapf said the film advocates the use of renewable energy sources, including solar and wind.

"We don't have to put people in harm's way," she said. "Renewable energy can bring us power without these threats."

She said further legal action is expected and she is hopeful that the uranium plans and plans for a new, coal fired plant will be cancelled.

"Few documentaries have

been made in the last 20 years that address the endemic environmental racism facing those living on Native American tribal lands," said a statement on the film's website. "Bringing the gentle story forth and allowing Navajo weavers to inspire support for Native American rights can help force the U.S. government and utility companies to make the shift towards cleaner and more sustainable energy choices."

The film had its first public screening on Wednesday, March 5, at the EarthVision International Environmental Film Festival in Santa Cruz, Calif.

To schedule a screening of the film, mail Helm Krapf at [linda@wovenways.org](mailto:linda@wovenways.org) For more information on the film and efforts to block the mining visit [www.wovenways.org](http://www.wovenways.org) [www.endaum.org](http://www.endaum.org), [www.dinecare.org](http://www.dinecare.org) and [www.sric.org](http://www.sric.org)