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Native American tribe claims nuclear waste can't be stored on its land

Joe Cavaretta / Associated Press file

Corbin Harney, an elder with the Western Shoshone Tribe, beats a drum during a May 2002 tribal protest near the planned Yucca Mountain national nuclear waste dump.

By John Sadler Thu, Aug 15, 2019 (2 a.m.)

To the Western Shoshone, most of Nevada isn't Nevada. At least not in the current sense.

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More than 150 years after the first treaty between the Western Shoshone and the federal government was signed, the two nations disagree on the outcome — the Shoshone say they never turned over their land.

The majority of the land in Nevada falls under the Shoshone's historical claim. It includes the Nevada National Security Site (formerly Nevada Test Site), which has released hundreds of tons of fallout in its operational history. It also includes Yucca Mountain, which has been the center of a decades-long argument centered on the long-term storage of the nation's nuclear waste.

The plan to turn the mountain into a nuclear waste facility drums up memories of past nuclear use of the land, and some members of the tribe are pushing back.

Ian Zabarte, Principal Man for the Western Shoshone Nation, was blunt—he'll never stop fighting against licensing Yucca Mountain as the nation's repository for nuclear waste.

“They need to just take Yucca Mountain off the table,” he said.

Shoshone and the federal government

The Western Shoshone is one of four main Native American tribes with historical ties to what is now Nevada. Besides the Shoshone, the Washoe and Northern Paiute and Southern Paiute tribes have roots here.

The Western Shoshone had one of the largest historical territories within modern-day Nevada, stretching from the southwest corner, wrapping around most of current-day Clark County and up to the northeast corner.

“Our land's bleeding,” Zabarte said.

The relationship between the Western Shoshone and the federal government is different than the agreements made between the government and many other tribes.

For example, the main defining document of the relationship between the Western Shoshone and the federal government is the Treaty of Ruby Valley, signed in 1863. The Shoshone did not cede land claims to the federal government in the treaty. Instead the tribe granted Americans the right to enter its lands for passage and developments like railways and mining. In return, the federal government would compensate the tribe.

Unlike many other Native American nations whose moves to reservations were considered de facto cession of their land rights, the Shoshone claim they have never lost ownership of their traditional land.

The treaty includes a clause allowing the president to move the Shoshone to reservations, but there is no language transferring land rights.

Zabarte discussed what he said was the misuse of the land.

“It's the language of the land. The mystery, the magic, the spirit, a creator, whatever you want to say,” he said. “I don't understand why so many people are willing to dispose of it in such a way.”



Zabarte is an outspoken advocate against nuclear testing, nuclear waste storage and what he calls the unlawful seizure of Shoshone land by the federal government.

The nuclear tests were not insubstantial. Thirteen kilotons of nuclear fallout rained on Hiroshima, Japan, the first city to suffer a nuclear strike, in 1945. Compare that with the Nevada Test Site: Over a 40-year period, tests triggered 620 kilotons of fallout on Nevada, Arizona and Utah, according to a 2009 study in the Nevada Law Journal.

This fallout hit lands where Western Shoshone live, including in Nye County, home to the Duckwater Shoshone tribe reservation in Railroad Valley.

Zabarte grows stoic when he mentions his family's medical history—cancer, in many members, which he attributes to the nuclear fallout.

“This is the kind of burden that we’re dealing with by ourselves,” he said.

Shoshone are more susceptible to radiation poisoning than other populations because of lifestyle differences. For example, Shoshone eat essentially all of the game they hunt, and eating meat such as deer thyroid can give a larger dose of radiation than other parts of an irradiated deer.

Yucca Mountain

Storage of nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain is the subject of what has become a yearslong battle pitting Nevada and its congressional delegation against federal lawmakers from states across the country.

Yucca Mountain was designated as the nation's only permanent nuclear waste storage site in the 1980s, but was defunded by the Obama administration in 2010. There have been multiple attempts in Congress to revive the project since.

It takes almost two hours to drive from Las Vegas to the mountain, which is the site of a five-mile-deep exploratory tunnel and not much else.

Canisters holding nuclear waste, if it is ever stored there, would be placed deep within the mountain, covered by titanium drip shields—a corrosion-resistant alloy covering. Without the shields, the government surmises, dripping water could corrode the canisters, causing the release

of radioactive waste into the mountain's underground water and carrying it to the outside environment.

Zabarte worries about the long-term commitment of the federal government to keeping Yucca safe—and if nuclear waste is stored there, it would require a long-term commitment.

Plutonium-239, which is used in nuclear reactors and for nuclear weapons, is among the waste targeted for long-term storage. It has a half-life of more than 24,000 years—meaning half of its radioactivity will decay in 24,000 years.

“Are we going to trust [that] America is going to be around to put in drip shields in 100 years?” Zabarte said.

Many Shoshone leaders see the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste project as a continuation of their traditional land's exposure to nuclear materials.

Joe Kennedy, a past chairman of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, was named to the Native Community Action Council in 2017. Immediately after taking his place on the council, he issued a statement criticizing the federal government.

“The Department of Energy has failed to protect Native Americans, leaving us unprotected, if not for the Native Community Action Council intervening in 2008, and now, against the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to protect the land and people of the Great Basin,” he said.

There are multiple bills under consideration in Congress regarding the future of Yucca Mountain.

The Nuclear Waste Administration Act of 2019 seems to have the most momentum going forward. The bill, sponsored by Sens. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska; Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.; and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., would require multiple levels of approval from affected state, local and tribal governments before the creation of any nuclear waste repository.

The bill as it is currently written would not apply to Yucca Mountain, however. Members of Nevada's congressional delegation are working to change that. Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen have been in talks with West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, to amend the legislation to include Yucca Mountain.

Robert Halstead, the executive director of Nevada's Agency for Nuclear Projects, said the state was excited but skeptical until it sees the amendment's language.

Zabarte is skeptical as well.

Though Zabarte said he appreciated work the Nevada delegation had done to stop Yucca, he wished it would tackle a larger problem—the seizure of Shoshone land.

“Nevada's position is that Yucca Mountain belongs to the federal government,” he said. “That is not the Shoshone position.”

Zabarte said the focus of the story should be about Yucca, about the land being used for nuclear testing and other projects.

“The story isn’t me. That’s not what’s going to last over 10,000 years. The story is going to be about our relationship to the land, the water,” he said. “Hopefully it’s not going to be a story about how we destroyed that—this generation ...”

As Zabarte talks, he returns to the nature of the Western Shoshone, the amount of hardship they’ve had to endure.

“We’re not good at dying,” he said.

This story originally appeared in the Las Vegas Weekly.



[Grace M Potorti](#) is with [Are Esz](#) and [8 others](#) in [Reno, Nevada](#).

Today (8.14), AIM (American Indian Movement) **submitted a Proclamation to the Reno City Council for the Abolishment of Columbus Day**. I was honored to show my support as a Italian American. [+40](#)

Proudest moments from the classroom — and they have nothing to do with test scores [Mark Shrayber](#)

https://www.upworthy.com/the-proudest-moments-from-the-classroom-and-they-have-nothing-to-do-with-test-scores?utm_source=The+Upworthiest&utm_campaign=f94eba0340-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_22_07_15_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_78f827fba6-f94eba0340-237970625

Boarding schools <https://youtu.be/4PXI8wSykLQ>

- **Seen on the St. Croix: The eagle has landed ... on something big**

Dan and Andie Goff of Woodbury had just motored their boat from the Afton Marina when they spotted something startling.

<http://strib.mn/2TBsdPl>



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Magpie (Ur
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by Su Min Du.

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- Wyoming is determined to get off the fossil fuel grid. A wide-ranging package of new laws passed by the legislature last year aims to wean the state off its heavy reliance on the oil, gas and coal industries, and stem the flow of young people leaving for better jobs.
- Having been swayed by the notion that a rural economic revival can be built on coding skills, Wyoming's 48 school districts will have until the 2022-2023 school year to [begin teaching computer science at every grade level](#). (NYT)
- And if they get really good at CS, then: [Top secret teens: The high schoolers recruited by the National Security Agency Alex Marquardt profile](#) (CNN)
- ['Coal is over': the miners rooting for the Green New Deal: Appalachia's main industry is dying and some workers are looking to a new economic promise after Trump's proves empty](#) (Guardian)

[Fracking and Shale Drilling Caused Spike in Climate-Warming Methane Pollution](#)

SHARON KELLY, DESMOGBLOG

While carbon dioxide hit a new high last year, it isn't the only climate-warming gas that's on the rise globally. A new study reveals that methane is also rising in the U.S. and around the world due to shale drilling and fracking. The vast majority of new natural gas production over the past decade has come from shale drilling and fracking in North America, even though the climate impacts are global. [Read the Article →](#)

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1. Flood building standards	6. Decision on Keystone XL pipeline	Bering Sea climate resilience plan	16. Mining restrictions in Bristol Bay, Alaska
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The list shows dozens of environmental policies that the Trump...

[Trump Order May Open California's Giant Sequoia Nat'l Monument To Development](https://www.sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com)
sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com

Trump's Latest Proposal Would Let Businesses Discriminate Based On LGBTQ Status, Race, Religion, and More

Dominic Holden, BuzzFeed

Holden writes: "The Trump administration on Wednesday formally proposed a new rule to let businesses with federal contracts cite religious objections as a valid reason to discriminate against their workers on the basis of LGBTQ status, sex, race, ethnicity, national origin, and other characteristics - thereby skirting worker protections created by past presidents."

[READ MORE](#)

Protesters Crash ALEC Conference to Resist Bill Criminalizing Pipeline Activists

CANDICE BERND, TRUTHOUT

A group of protesters with the Austin chapter of Extinction Rebellion were briefly detained Thursday after disrupting a private meeting at the American Legislative Exchange Council's annual conference to protest the organization's role in developing a "critical infrastructure" bill that charges those who damage or disrupt operations of oil and gas facilities with a felony.

[Read the Article →](#)

If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in. ~Rachel Carson

**Celebrate the newest adventurer
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www.knpb.org/molly-of-denali

KNPB 

**MOLLY
of DENALI**

The Reno-Sparks Indian Colony's Eagle Wing Pageant Dancers will perform in conjunction with a public screening of Molly of Denali on Sunday at 2 p.m., at Bartley Ranch. In addition, the first 200 kids can make mini hand drums and enjoy a nature walk. For more information, call 784.4555.

[NDNCollective](#)

In a time of climate crisis, the world needs to recognize Indigenous knowledge systems and our relationship to the land. We are the BEST guardians of our lands, and protectors of the Earth.

While Indigenous people make up just 5% of the world's population, we protect 80% of biodiversity (vast varieties of plants, animals, organisms and ecosystems) remaining on this planet.

[What Indigenous Rights Have to Do With Fighting Climate Change](#)

newrepublic.com



[Forest management company returns 50,000 acres of land to Yurok Tribe](#)

[By KRCR News, 8/14/19](#)

KLAMATH, Calif. — Green Diamond and Western Rivers Conservancy have agreed to return tens of thousands of acres of ancestral lands to the Yurok Tribe. On Monday, Aug. 19, the Yurok Tribe, Green Diamond Resource Company and Western Rivers Conservancy will celebrate a decade-long, hard-won effort to preserve and place into tribal ownership approximately 50,000 acres of forest surrounding four salmon sustaining streams, including Blue Creek, according to tribal leaders.

[New mapping reveals lost West Coast estuary habitat](#) [By Phys.org, 8/14/19](#)

An unprecedented survey has revealed the loss of about 85 percent of historical tidal wetlands in California, Oregon, and Washington. The report, published today in PLOS ONE, also highlights forgotten estuary acreage that might now be targeted for restoration. Where West Coast rivers reach the sea, estuaries serve as critical nurseries for juvenile salmon and steelhead as they make the transition from freshwater to the ocean. They are among the most dynamic and productive habitats known, also supporting migratory birds and a variety of other fish, shellfish, and terrestrial wildlife.

[World's Largest Frybread! New Cedar Lakes Casino Sets World Record](#)



Posted

By [Paul G](#) August 13th, 2019 Blog

On August 10, 2019, the [Cedar Lakes Casino](#) attempted a Guinness World Record to celebrate their Grand Opening!

The new casino is located in Cass Lake, Minnesota and features 100 guest rooms, 650 gaming machines, and 250 seat banquet facility. The casino is operated by the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

The [frybread](#) needed to be over 66 pounds to set the record. Mike Marcotte from Guinness was on hand to witness the attempt!

The dough is proofed and is ready to get fried! [@GWR pic.twitter.com/KqncCBs0AA](#)
— Mike Marcotte (@mike_marcotte) [August 10, 2019](#)

The frybread from Cedar Lakes Casino came out at 150.2 pounds!

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