

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 13, 2017

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White Mesa Ute Protest & Spiritual Walk Demands Closure of Energy Fuels' Uranium Mill due to concerns about health, air and water pollution, destruction of ancient sacred sites

WHITE MESA, UT – Over a hundred people led by members of the Ute Mountain Ute tribe participated in a peaceful protest rally and spiritual walk along Highway 191 from the reservation community of White Mesa to the Energy Fuels uranium mill on Saturday. Tribal members and supporters from across southern Utah and as far away as Australia were met at the turnoff by mill employees who attempted to block the road with pickup trucks. After funneling past the first roadblock, tribal members confronted law enforcement, demanding to be allowed to proceed to the mill gate. Peaceful protestors chanted “water is life,” sang traditional Ute Mountain Ute songs, and then returned to the White Mesa Community Center for a community meeting to plan next steps.

The tribal member grassroots group White Mesa Concerned Community organized the rally and spiritual walk to express concern about the nation's last operating uranium mill contaminating water, air, land, and sacred sites, as well as risks to human health in the area. They were joined by tribal officials, including Ute Mountain Ute tribal councilwoman Prislenna Rabbit, who traveled from the tribe's reservation in Towaoc, Colorado, and by former councilman Malcolm Lehi, who lives in White Mesa. Tribal members received support from many allies including Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, Grand Canyon Trust, Uranium Watch, Living Rivers, Haul No, PANDOS, and Canyon Country Rising Tide.

“If this mill contaminates our water, where are we going to go?” asked community member Ephraim Dutchie. The community is concerned that the liners in the mill's large waste ponds may be leaking and could contaminate groundwater. “For the mill, this is about money. But for us this isn't about money. As Native Americans, we respect the land that Mother Earth gave us,” Dutchie said.

“I've lived here 67 years,” said lifelong White Mesa resident and White Mesa Concerned Community organizer Thelma Whiskers. “For so many years that mill has been there blowing dust and polluting our air. We can smell it. We want it shut down and cleaned up. We want our community protected.”

Tribal members

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe government, White Mesa tribal members, and supporters will now mobilize to speak out at the State of Utah's upcoming public hearing and public meeting on Energy Fuels' proposed renewal of their uranium mill's radioactive materials license, along with an application by the mill to process toxic waste from a Sequoyah Fuels operation near the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma.

June 8, 2017

1-5pm Public Hearing (Questions answered)

DEQ Computer Training Room, Room 2125
Utah Department of Environmental Quality
195 North 1950 West, Salt Lake City, Utah

Deadline to submit questions: May 29, 2017. Email questions to Director Scott Anderson at standerson@utah.gov

June 15, 2017

5-7pm Public Meeting (Citizens can offer comments and questions which are recorded)
Blanding Arts and Events Center, 715 West 200, South Blanding, Utah

A 60-day public comment period for the proposed license renewal closes at 5pm on June 30, 2017. Written comments can be mailed to the Utah Division of Waste Management and Radiation Control, P.O. Box 144880, Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4850 or by email to dwmrcpublic@utah.gov with the subject line: Public Comment on White Mesa RML Renewal.

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White Mesa Concerned Community is a grassroots group of concerned citizens of the Ute Mountain Ute community of White Mesa, Utah, located 3 miles south of the White Mesa uranium mill. We work to inform our fellow citizens and protect our community, health, water, air, land, culture, and sacred sites from toxic contamination.