

Ahmut Pipa Foundation
Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice
Comite Civico del Valle Inc.

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Contact:

Preston Arrow-weed, Ahmut Pipa Foundation 928-388-9456

Bradley Angel, Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice 415-722-5270

Indigenous Rights & Environmental Justice Victory!
Gold Mine Company Drops Plans for Indian Pass as Indigenous People and Allies
Celebrate Victory: Major Indigenous Cultural and Sacred Indian Pass Saved Again!

Quechan tribal members and supporters are celebrating victory in their fight to save Indian Pass from a controversial gold mine project proposed by Kore Mining/IUC. Located about 30 miles north of Winterhaven, California and Yuma, Arizona, Indian Pass has enormous cultural and sacred significance to the Quechan and other indigenous people in the region.

Faced with determined opposition from the Quechan Tribe, the Ahmut Pipa Foundation (a tribal member organization), Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice, and local and national allies, the company has withdrawn plans to conduct exploratory drilling for potential mining (using a toxic cyanide process) in the Indian Pass area. A February 10th email from the Bureau of Land Management confirmed that the company dropped plans for proposed drilling and mining at Indian Pass. According to the BLM, the company's amended Plan of Operations proposes exploration activities at the East Mesquite and Ogilby project segments only.

“The company claimed they held valid mining claims, but indigenous people have demonstrated that we have used these areas for thousands of years and our claims are the most important and need to be respected,” said Preston Arrow-weed, Quechan Elder and leader of the Ahmut Pipa Foundation. “We have again protected Indian Pass, making a strong stand along with the Quechan Tribe, Greenaction, and other allies.”

The victory comes after a year of hard work by the Ahmut Pipa Foundation, the Quechan Tribe, and allies including Greenaction, Comite Civico del Valle Inc, Earthworks, Center for Biological Diversity, and the Western Mining Action Project. On November 20, 2021, the Quechan Tribe held a well-attended Spiritual Walk and Protest against the gold mine project. At the event, Quechan Tribal President Jordan Joaquin and tribal members including elder Preston Arrow-weed made powerful statements vowing total opposition to the project on sacred lands.

The company had requested approval from the BLM and Imperial County despite being fully aware that the Indian Pass area had profound cultural and sacred significance to the Quechan, including the “Trail of Dreams” where for thousands of years indigenous people conducted ceremonies. Indian Pass is filled with ancient petroglyphs, geoglyphs, and artifacts. Destruction of this area would have resulted in the loss of many of these important and irreplaceable pieces of history. All of Indian Pass has been deemed an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and a portion of it falls within the California Desert Conservation Area.

“This victory protecting Indian Pass should be a wake-up call for all gold mine companies to stay away from environmentally sensitive areas and stop desecrating indigenous lands,” said Bradley Angel, Executive Director of Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice.

“This is a very important win for the Tribes and for our entire community,” said Luis Olmedo, Executive Director of Comité Civico del Valle, Inc., an important community organization in Imperial County.

“Protecting Indian Pass from desecration by toxic mining is a victory for the Quechan Tribe, their resources, and for environmental justice,” said Jared Naimark, Earthworks’ California mining organizer. “With gold exploration on the rise across California, it sets a powerful example of Indigenous peoples’ right to say no to mining on sacred land. Following this example, President Biden should keep his promise and finalize mining rules to strengthen protections for sacred lands from unfettered mining.”

This is not the first time that the Quechan have defended and protected Indian Pass. In the mid-1990s, Glamis Gold proposed to mine at Indian Pass, but that attempt was also defeated.