

LOCAL

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Uranium mining

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steps of Mitchell and Rita Capitan, who started the organization in 1994 in response to community concerns about the proposed HRI mines.

Mitchell Capitan worked as a lab technician at an in-situ leach mine known as the Section 9 Pilot Project, where he was responsible for compiling groundwater restoration data for operator Mobil Oil. Capitan found that Mobil was unable to restore groundwater to pre-mining conditions and was concerned that once HRI contaminated the Dakota Sandstone and Westwater Canyon aquifers during the extraction process, it would face a similar situation.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's 1997 Final Environmental Impact Statement found that water quality within the aquifers "is good and meets New Mexico drinking water quality standards."

Mobil pilot project

In-situ leach mining involves a series of injection and production wells laid out in geometric patterns known as "well fields." Mining is

conducted by injecting a solution of water, dissolved oxygen and sodium bicarbonate through the injection wells and into areas of uranium mineralization called "ore zones." The solution dissolves the uranium in the ore zone and causes it to become mobile in the aquifer.

The uranium is then pumped to the surface, stripped from the groundwater for processing into "yellowcake," and further refined into fuel for nuclear power plants, according to the ENDAUM petition. The groundwater is then returned to the aquifer to extract more uranium.

The Mobil Oil pilot site was located on five acres of land leased from a Navajo allottee and consisted of nine injection wells and four recovery wells, according to a September 2015 letter penned by David Taylor, then an attorney with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice.

The proposed HRI project would encompass 100 acres and instead of having only one well pattern like the Mobil pilot site, the Section 8 site would incorporate as many as 13 well patterns, Taylor said, meaning the likelihood of more contam-

inants and the need for more restoration.

Chemical injection at the Mobil site lasted not quite a year and "even after this limited period, restoration could not be achieved," he said. Restoration lasted six years, from October 1980 to October 1986.

In 1981 it became apparent that molybdenum would be a restoration problem, Taylor said, and in 1988 the Nuclear Regulatory Commission terminated Mobil's source material license due to the cost and limited success of additional restoration. Radium also was not restored to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's drinking water standard.

Environmental justice

During proceedings in March 2005 before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, John Leeper, Ph.D., a staff member of the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources, testified that the Westwater aquifer was used by more than 13,000 people for drinking water.

Leeper said it is viewed by the Navajo Nation as the most important groundwater resource for future

drinking water supplies in Eastern Navajo Agency. Navajo Tribal Utility Authority operates two wells within the aquifer that provide water to thousands of Diné in Crownpoint and the surrounding area of Becenti, Littlewater and Nahodishgish.

Perry believes that potential contamination of the aquifers and the endangerment of local ENDAUM members living within the project area, in addition to the lack of consultation and community involvement, are human rights issues. Community members signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which provides for "free, prior and informed consent." The United States and the Navajo Nation government did not.

However, the Inter-American Commission said that if ENDAUM's allegations are proven, the United States could be in breach of petitioners' rights to life and personal security, preservation of health and well-being, benefits of culture, fair trial and property, guaranteed by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.

"The action taken is what ENDAUM has been wanting to do on behalf of our communities, mak-

ing sure that we are treated just and that our concerns regarding these projects are acknowledged," Perry said. "This petition that was filed, we feel, is a positive step in terms of addressing federal policies and how they do not correlate with the ideas of the community."

"We feel that not only the license from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission but also the aquifer exemption permit from EPA Region 9 needs to be revoked in order to secure a more prosperous future for our Navajo communities that are going to be looking for adequate water supplies," he said. "We feel that the aquifer exemption would jeopardize the future potential for supplies for the communities that include the local aquifers."

Water supplies dwindling

Navajos returning to their homeland amid today's mega-drought are finding dwindling drinking water supplies. This past Monday, the Bureau of Reclamation declared the first-ever water shortage on the Colorado River and began imple-

menting cutbacks at a time when the West is besieged by wildfires.

Navajo Tribal Utility Authority in July began limiting water hauling from its loading stations to 500 gallons per week for single loads, or 2,000 gallons per month. Water hauling for livestock is prohibited.

"The drought situation on the Navajo Nation continues to be dire," Perry said. "We feel that the ISL operations can lead to potential contamination of more locations within the aquifer, which would then jeopardize the plans for Navajo Nation to use that groundwater."

Additionally, the Navajo Nation has seen a degradation of cultural sites and an increase in cancers, kidney disease and respiratory issues among residents living near the more than 500 abandoned uranium mines left over from the Cold War. "Further studies that would specifically target potential exposure and potential health impacts are needed," Perry said. "We will remain vigilant of future projects — any attempts to file for licenses, anything that puts our communities at risk for potential future contamination," he said.

Ceremonial Queen

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audience Saturday, but she said she did have the "support system" of extended family members in Gallup. "It was so sad that it ended up as the same weekend," Ballenger said of the Ceremonial Queen pageant's scheduling conflict with the Santa Fe Indian Market.

Six contestants

The Ceremonial Queen Pageant Show was sponsored by the Inter-Tribal Ceremonial Office, the New Mexico state agency that took over the pageant from the locally run Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Association.

The nearly two-hour program, which featured comedian James Jones as the emcee and entertainment by singer-songwriter Sage Bond, showcased the pageant's traditional talent competition and the crowning of the new Miss Ceremonial.

In addition to Ballenger, this year's contestants were Amy Begay, from Kayenta, Arizona and Bealberto Chantel Jones, from Naschitti and Gallup; Charlene Begay from Lukachukai, Arizona, and Farmington; Ehea Kaanasee, of Pinehill; and Tashantia David, of Twin Lakes. Makana Lani Pike, from Whitewater, Arizona, withdrew from the competition prior to Saturday's event.

2021 honors

First runner-up honors went to Chantel Jones. Charlene Begay was named second runner-up, and she also took first place for her personality photo. Amy Begay was voted Miss Congeniality, and Tashantia David was honored with the Spirit Award.

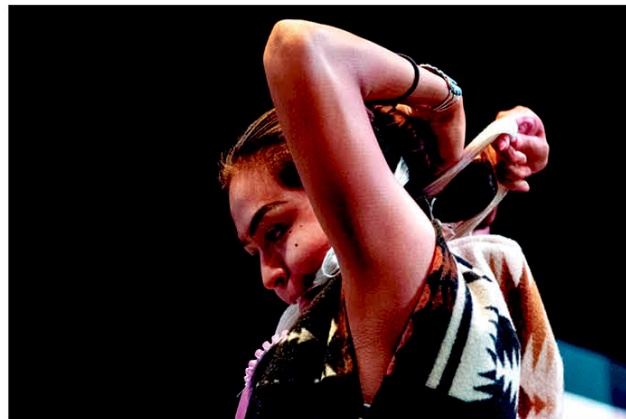
Outgoing Ceremonial Princess Mya Morez, however, may have stolen the show with her big personality. Throughout the program, the second-grader made numerous trips onstage to deliver prepared remarks or just stand next to 2019-2021 Ceremonial Queen Autumn Pilcher and this year's contestants.

Before Ballenger was crowned, Pilcher asked for a moment of silence to remember everyone lost to COVID-19 as she began her farewell remarks. An emotional Pilcher said she had decided to "speak from the heart" rather than deliver a prepared speech.

Pilcher, who has Mesquero Apache, Navajo, and Oglala Lakota tribal ancestry, said the Miss Gallup Ceremonial title had changed her life and made her a stronger



Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial Queen first runner-up Chantel Jones tells hogan stories for her traditional talent during the pageant at El Morro Theatre in Gallup Saturday.



Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial Queen second runner-up Charlene Begay demonstrates how to tie her hair in a traditional tsiiyéél during the pageant at El Morro Theatre in Gallup Saturday.

person. Pilcher's reign was extended an extra year because of the pandemic, and she said she tried to represent herself, her family, Gallup, and Ceremonial officials well. "I just want to say thank you for

trusting me with this title," Pilcher concluded.

Outdoor educator

As the new 2021 Ceremonial

Queen, Ballenger said her platform over the next year will be focused on connecting youth to outdoor activities and Mother Nature. According to Ballenger, one of her current personal challenges is to climb each

of the four sacred mountains of the Diné. She recently climbed the 14,351-foot Blanca Peak in Colorado and the 11,305-foot Mount Taylor outside of Grants.

Currently living in Colorado and working as an outdoor exhibits educator at the Children's Museum of Denver, Ballenger said she hopes to visit schools and encourage outdoor activities, from hiking to picking up trash.

"I just really want to make an impact with the youth and open their eyes to what's outside instead of what's on their screens," she said. Ballenger, a graduate of Rehoboth Christian High School, has a bachelor's degree in family and child studies from the University of New Mexico. In the future, she said, she would like to work as an outdoor educator teaching activities like hiking, camping, kayaking.

Ballenger is a member of an organization that serves Native American communities.

Sisterhood created

Ballenger expressed appreciation for the Ceremonial Queen Pageant Committee members and their work to stage the pageant. She said the bond forged between the contestants was the best aspect of the pageant.

"It was definitely the sisterhood that we created between the contestants," Ballenger explained, describing her fellow contestants as great role models who all showed up, put "their best foot forward," and supported each other.

Ballenger cited two of the pageant committee members, Pilcher and former Miss Indian World 2019-2021 Cheyenne Kippenberger, for promoting that supportive environment.

"They just set a really positive tone, saying we're not here competing against each other, we're competing against ourselves," Ballenger said.

After the pageant concluded Saturday evening, Ballenger explained, the contestants offered more supportive messages to each other through a shared text thread. One of those messages, she said, captured their close bond: "We came in as strangers, but we left as sisters." Ballenger said she is now looking forward to promoting the Gallup Ceremonial's 100th anniversary in 2022.

"I am very excited for next year and spreading the word about the centennial," Ballenger said. "I feel very honored to have that responsibility. Ceremonial has been such a big part of my life."

Rapid response

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Secretary Designate Kurt Steinhaus said. "At this point, we are not closing schools. The caveat is that the virus could change things, but we need to do what's best for kids, which is to keep in-person learning to the extent possible."

The New Mexico Environment Department keeps track of rapid responses based on its own reports and those from other state agencies, including the Public Education Department. A rapid response is one or more positive cases at a school that were infectious while on campus. Previously, schools that reached the four-in-14 threshold were required to return to remote learning.

Due to an increase of cases and to allow for deep cleaning and to limit further spread of the virus, some schools are choosing to voluntarily return to remote instruction. To date, 18 schools have informed the Public Education Department that they are temporarily moving to remote instruction.

As a reminder, New Mexico's public schools are requiring staff, educators, students and visitors to wear masks at all times except when eating or drinking.

The complete COVID-19 Rapid Response Watchlist is available online www.env.nm.gov/rapid-response-data/.

Broadband

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Tribal Utility Authority, which is a Navajo government business.

"Connecting broadband and cell service to our Navajo people is the ultimate goal," Navajo Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. said. "There are countless benefits of having broadband, especially during this pandemic, where our students will be learning from home, and the partnerships with developing telecommunication infrastructure on the Navajo Nation is crucial.

Begay, who represents the chapters of Low Mountain, Nazlini, Many Farms, Tachee/Blue Gap, and Teslani/Cottonwood, added, "We will continue to discuss and advocate to key state and federal stakeholders to make this happen."

The news release reported that Arizona will financially invest in infrastructure planning as it continues to encourage the Navajo Nation to reach out for resources that could help with broadband financial capacity for operation and maintenance expenses.

Football

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athletes that came out that never played football before. We just have to work on them so they understand the game. A lot of that comes in the special teams. Once we get them better in special teams and we

Spartan rout

With a new quarterback and new center not in sync, Gallup coughed the ball up with Reece fumbling the ball on the first play of the game.

In one of the few bright spots, Gallup senior Andrew

his first of four TDs of the night.

On Gallup's next possession, the Bengals again fumbled the ball away and Ludi-Herrera picked up the loose ball and sprinted 40 yards for another score. Ludi-Herrera made it 20-0

The Spartans added two more points when Reece was sacked in the end zone for a safety. After a short Bengal punt, Bernalillo pushed it to 43-0 with 1:50 left in the first quarter on a one-yard quarterback sneak by Pino.

With the 43 points scored Molinar bolted for 16 yards that ended the game with the 50-point mercy rule win, 50-0. Reece completed 1 of 5 passes for 25 yards with a pair of interceptions that were re-

Kody hopefully we'll have him back in a couple of weeks."

Grants next

Gallup will be looking to regroup when it travels east on I-40 to arch-rival Grants Friday night.

kind of got to see what athletes they have. We'll be excited for that game just because we should always be excited for Grants. It's a rivalry. It's one of the longest rivalries in the state."

This season the Pirates have a new coaching staff with new

