



June 6, 2020

Brian Riley
District Ranger
Jemez Ranger District
Santa Fe National Forest
P.O. Box 150
Jemez Springs, NM 87025

Mr. Riley:

I hope this letter finds you well and in good health. I am writing this letter to express our opposition to the proposed South Pit Pumice Mine expansion in the Jemez Mountains on the lands managed by the Jemez Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest, United States Forest Service.

The Jemez people have been living in the Jemez Mountains since time immemorial. The Spanish Conquistadors found us living in our homeland in the 1540's and so named the mountains after us. The Jemez people were strong and well established in the Jemez Mountains numbering in the thousands at the time of Spanish contact. We constructed over 40 large villages, that were well over 500 rooms and constructed thousands of field houses and summer dwellings in the river floodplains and open meadows, built trails into resource procurement areas and to our sacred shrines on top of mountain peaks and special places within the homeland in the Jemez Mountains. No other people can more rightfully lay claim to the land and resources of the Jemez Mountains than Jemez tribal members whose ancestors built cities, cultivated the land, hunted, gathered, were born, lived, died, and were buried in these mountains. Thousands of archeological sites marking the mesas, canyons, and springs in the Jemez Mountains are attributed to the Jemez people. An entire Jemez civilization flourished in these mountains. The descendants of this civilization, though much reduced in number, live on. The Jemez People are adept farmers and hunters, whose food acquisition and storage techniques have sustained them all of these centuries in the same mountain location.

The Jemez people are speakers of the Towa language – a language completely unique in the world. No other people speak this language, except Pecos Pueblo whose tribal members joined the Jemez at Walatowa or Jemez Pueblo in 1838. Upwards of eighty percent of the existing 3,400 tribal members at the village of Walatowa at the base of the Jemez Mountains speak this language fluently. It is our first language; taught in the home to toddlers who then learn English as they enter elementary school.

Office of the Governor

4471 Highway 4, Box 100 • Jemez Pueblo • New Mexico • 87024
(575) 834-7359 • Fax (575) 834-7331

Our People lost their freedom to the Spanish and much of our land to Spanish, American and other European settlers. During the 20th century, large parcels of land that we retained throughout the earlier assaults were lost to Anglo squatters who exploited loopholes in federal law and lax government enforcement of tribal rights. In the first half of the 20th century the American government unlawfully appropriated large areas of Jemez ancestral Indian title lands for inclusion in national forests and Taylor grazing districts. A homeland that once covered at least one million acres now includes only 89,000 acres as Jemez Indian Reservation

The pumice mine is located in the heart of the Jemez ancestral domain and the land is very sacred to the Jemez people. The Towa name for the mountain where the pumice mine is located is called “Pha ma peh”, and the rich grassy valley in which Western Wheat Grass grows in abundance, adjacent to “Pha ma peh” on the south side is called “Hemish a kien sha nu” a name which means “the place Jemez has their wheat grass”. The two cultural landscapes are connected. Since Jemez People were getting straw from the Western Wheat Grass to make adobes and to feed their domesticated animals and “Pah ma peh” does not have any Western Wheat Grass growing on it the translation for the mountain is “The Mountain where there is no Wheat Grass”. “Pah ma peh” is a sacred mountain and considered a geographic land mark by the Jemez and the grassy meadow where the Western Wheat Grass grows is referred to as the Rivera Ranch today was a place where the Jemez took their horses to graze during the early spring thru mid-summer. In July the men would get the horses back to the Pueblo to use them to thresh the wheat they were harvesting. The whole cultural landscape is considered a Traditional Cultural Property and also house Jemez ancestral shrines and sites. Some of these are in the form of archaeological sites and others are special procurement areas used for collecting wild game, medicinal plants, and evergreen limbs for our dances throughout the calendar year. All of the lands managed by the Jemez Ranger District are very special to the Jemez people for they bear the footprints of our ancestors and nobody has the right to destroy the areas where they once hunted, planted, gathered medicinal plants, and raised their families. This land is very much used in the same way today as it was then.

The villages and fieldhouses that are identified as archeological sites are not dead. Just because we don’t live there anymore doesn’t mean they’re dead. No, they are alive with the spirits of our ancestors that once lived there. Not a day goes by that they are not forgotten. With the coming of a new day people rise up with corn meal in their hand and greet the sun, thanking the Creator and our ancestors that reside in the ancestral homeland, to the north, west, south, and east for the gift of a new day and ask for blessings for the people of our world, our village, and our homes. Every time there is a ceremony in Jemez Pueblo the spirits that reside in the ancestral homeland are called upon to take that spiritual journey to our village and bring blessings to the people, our homeland and our planet. The Jemez Mountains are our home. The Forest Rangers, the Superintendents and managers for the Federal Government agencies that manage the Jemez Ancestral lands may come and go, make changes to policies that govern the management of the land but Jemez People are here to stay.

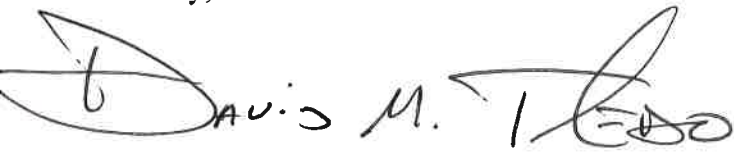
There is no question that the Jemez Mountains are a sacred cultural landscape, not only to the Jemez People but to all the Native American tribes and Hispanic people that use the geographic landscape to collect medicinal plants, animals and all the natural resources that it has to offer to the people. Native American tribes and Hispanic people have their own procurement areas, they’re own special and sacred places that play a role in their identity as Indian and Hispanic peoples. That is the reason why the All Pueblo Council of Governors previously passed a motion to declare the Jemez Mountains as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP). Our Pueblo leaders are looking to the future and trying to find the path forward; the path that will protect and preserve the Jemez Mountains for future generations of Jemez and other Native People.

Office of the Governor

4471 Highway 4, Box 100 • Jemez Pueblo • New Mexico • 87024
(575) 834-7359 • Fax (575) 834-7331

With this said the Pueblo of Jemez opposes the proposed South Pit Pumice Mine expansion. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at (575) 834-7359.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David M. Toledo". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "D" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David M. Toledo
Governor

Office of the Governor

4471 Highway 4, Box 100 • Jemez Pueblo • New Mexico • 87024
(575) 834-7359 • Fax (575) 834-7331