



Honor the Earth

PRESS RELEASE
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*Skull Valley Goshute Reservation in Utah Goes Solar:
Honor the Earth Launches August 22 Retrofit to Pilot a New Energy Economy*

For more than a decade, Skull Valley Goshute tribal members worked diligently to fight the siting of a proposed nuclear waste dump on their Utah reservation. A small, volunteer group called Ohngo Gaudadeh Devia (OGD) led the effort, standing down a consortium of some of the largest electric utilities in the country, headed by the Minnesota-based giant Xcel Energy, a corporation with a long and sordid history with Native peoples.

Xcel had been ordered by the Minnesota state legislature in 1994 to find an alternative site away from Prairie Island, home to the Prairie Island Mdewakanton Community, for storing its radioactive garbage. In response, Xcel forged an alliance with other utilities to create a 'private' dump on one of the poorest and most isolated reservations in the country – Skull Valley – planning to transport high-level nuclear waste from one Native territory to another.

A protracted and pitched battle around the Skull Valley dump ensued, and last September, grassroots reservation-based groups and their national allies celebrated a precedent-setting victory when two agencies within the Department of Interior, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, rejected plans for the private dump, which would have housed 44,000 tons of spent radioactive fuel outside on 800 acres of tribal land.

Less than a year after that victory, the Skull Valley reservation is going solar. Honor the Earth, a national Native environmental advocacy group and foundation that focuses on energy issues, has developed a pilot project in conjunction with OGD and Solar Energy International (SEI) that will present a viable community alternative to destructive energy policies in general, and nuclear waste in particular.

“This is the chance to demonstrate what is right,” said Honor the Earth Executive Director Winona LaDuke. “Utah and the Goshute people have been fighting a bad set of energy choices, and this one battle over nuclear waste has been won. As nuclear power raises its head again, however, it is crucial that we move towards a new energy economy- one based on life, not on radiation and death. This collaborative solar project illustrates a new energy future for Utah, the Skull Valley Goshute community and other indigenous peoples,” she added.

The pilot project kicks off August 22 with a solar heating demonstration by Henry Red Cloud, who directs Lakota Solar Enterprises and has installed over 100 solar heaters on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. A certified solar training co-led by Solar Energy International and Honor the Earth renewable energy technicians will follow, running from August 23-25. The net result will be the solar retrofitting of the OGD office, home to Margene Bullcreek, the elder leader of the grassroots group.

Bullcreek's home is one of only five homes on the reservation. Honor the Earth's goal is to spur a community wide solar initiative over the next three years that will result in retrofitting all reservation homes. The photovoltaic system for Bullcreek's home is a "take apart system," meaning it can be used in the future for other trainings as needed.

"Our solar demonstration project can provide a model for our community, and also a nationwide example of reservation-based renewable development," said Bullcreek. "We have been successful in defeating a nuclear waste dump, and now look to developing a future reservation economy based on sustainability that reflects our cultural values and traditions."

The Skull Valley installation is the third in a series of solar demonstration projects organized by Honor the Earth. The organization, in partnership with Solar Energy International, has conducted trainings and installations in Western Shoshone territory in Nevada and in Chiapas, Mexico. Honor the Earth is also piloting a wind demonstration project on the Pine Ridge Reservation this fall.

"It's time to look to a sustainable energy future that is built on developing the abundant and safe renewable resources that exist on Native lands" LaDuke said. "Native America should have wind and solar power, not coal mines and nuclear waste."

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER FOR THE FREE TRAINING:

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