

PRESS RELEASE:

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE: VOTES TO PROTECT AMERICAN INDIAN SACRED PLACES INCLUDING QUECHAN INDIAN PASS AREA FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF OPEN PIT MINING

Sacramento and Fort Yuma, California (April 7, 2003). The California State Assembly today voted overwhelmingly, 63 - 5, in favor of SB 22, a mining and sacred places bill authored by Senators John Burton (D - San Francisco) and Byron Sher (D - Palo Alto). The bill requires that new open pit mines in protected areas of the California desert would be required to completely backfill their open pits and recontour their mine sites. The law will also extend the state abandoned mines reclamation program.

SB 22 is an urgency bill, enacted to decouple the mining provision (SB 483) from last session's broader sacred lands bill (SB 1828) that the Governor vetoed. The strong bipartisan vote - with many Republicans voting in favor of the bill - indicates that the California Legislature is serious about protecting the sacred places of California Indians and protecting the people of California from the environmental harm caused by certain open pit mines.

At several points on the Assembly floor, the battle of the Quechan people to protect the Indian Pass area from open pit, cyanide heap-leach mining, was passionately argued by Assemblymembers Joe Nation (D - Marin) and Bonnie Garcia (R - Cathedral City). The Assembly vote was followed by a signing ceremony with the Governor and Quechan governmental and cultural representatives.

"We thank the State Legislature -- the passage of SB 22 will protect our most important resource - our history - because without preserving our past, we can't teach our other valuable resource, our youth, about what our ancestors left behind and our rich cultural history," stated Mike Jackson, Sr., President Quechan Nation.

"The Quechan people also thank Governor Davis for keeping his word and signing SB 22," continued President Jackson. "All too often in the past, promises have been made and broken to Native Americans. We are happy today, as we are taking a positive step into the future, working together."

"This bill will help protect Indian Pass, an area the Quechan consider to be very sacred," observed Vernon Smith, Quechan Culture Committee Member. "Equally important, this bill will also protect our environment from damages that may be caused by leaving deep open pits, huge waste piles and the chemicals used to extract ore that may contaminate groundwater. Contaminated water that accumulates in the abandoned open pits is also harmful to all living things. This bill will help prevent this from becoming a reality in our area."

"The California Legislature has taken a definitive step to do what the Norton Interior Department has so far refused to do - save Indian Pass," said Courtney Ann Coyle,

Attorney for the Quechan. "Interior Secretary Norton and her staff have still made no attempt to meet with the Quechan Tribal Government, the very people they are on a path to destroy by an ill-conceived reconsideration of the proposed mine."

President Jackson concluded, "The Quechan are a relentless people. We are survivors. We have and always will be survivors. We will not go away, and we will not lose this battle to protect the Quechan Indian Pass area."

To see the bills, visit:

(SB 22) http://info.sen.ca.gov/cgi-bin/postquery?bill_number=sb_22&sess=CUR&house=B&site=sen

(SB 483) http://info.sen.ca.gov/cgi-bin/postquery?bill_number=sb_483&sess=PREV&house=B&site=sen

For high-resolution images of the Quechan Indian Pass area, visit www.nationaltrust.org/11most/images/hi-res.
or call photographer Andrew Harvey at 818.469.1185.

Background:

History: The Indian Pass site - with its chips of black volcanic basalt and white quartz - has been described as a giant prehistoric chessboard. The Quechan and other Colorado River tribes have continuously used and revered this site for thousands of years for spiritual teaching and religious pilgrimages. The land is now owned by the federal government and managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Threat: Glamis Gold, a Canadian corporation with mining operations in Nevada, California, Mexico and Honduras, wants to dig a 200 square mile, cyanide heap-leach gold mine at the Indian Pass area. The mine would have three open pits up to 880 feet deep and create rock stockpiles as high as a thirty-story building. The deepest pit would never be backfilled. The ore is of such low grade that only one ounce of gold would be mined for every 422 tons of waste rock removed. The mine would also consume 389 million gallons of pristine desert groundwater each year. During the Clinton Administration, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt refused to issue a permit for the mine because it would irreparably harm the environment, the Quechan's spiritual places and over 55 recorded properties eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Now, however, the Bush Administration has reversed the ruling. The Indian Pass Area was designated as one of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2002 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Quechan Indian Nation is a federally-recognized Tribe. About 3,000 Tribal members live on the reservation. The Quechan is the third largest California land-based tribe, with about 45,000 acres in reservation status. Many members still speak their native language. Their aboriginal lands include the area protected in the Babbitt decision denying the

mine. The Tribe has utilized the area since time immemorial for religious, ceremonial and educational purposes. The Tribe intends to continue to use the area in the future. Tribal members also consider the area sacred apart from physical uses of the lands.

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