

**Big Protest
At Calpine Energy's Headquarters**

by Mark LeBeau, M.S.

January 29, 2007 marked the second protest at Calpine Energy Headquarters in San Jose, California. Protesters gathered to oppose the building of geothermal energy power plants in the Medicine Lake Highlands. The Highlands are located in the mountainous and volcanic region of northeastern California and are held as property of the federal government. Since genesis, these lands have been held sacred to Native peoples and as the name signifies, the lake is used as a medicinal place for healing and strengthening mind, body and soul. The region is also a training ground for Native medicine people and a place for Natives to seek visions and enlightenment.

Energy companies, working with the Bureau of Land Management and the California Energy Commission, have been trying to build geothermal power plants in the Highlands since the 1980s. The proposed process includes injecting and extracting large amounts of acid and other toxic fluids by drilling up to 9000 feet to fracture rock beneath the earth's surface. The "energy" polluting power plants would annually produce tons of toxic hydrogen sulfide gas, arsenic and mercury, which are known to cause birth defects and cancer. Potential pipeline ruptures, could allow acids and toxins to flow quickly through porous volcanic soil into the shallow water table below. This water table supplies Medicine Lake, as well as many springs,

lakes and water wells that supply drinking water to the local residents in the area. The project also threatens the underlying aquifer, California's largest spring system which flows into Fall River which joins the Pit River, then winds into the Sacramento River and the San Francisco Bay.

The power plants would pollute the sacred Highlands and cause irreversible contamination not only to the water but also to the air, soil, plants, and wildlife habitats, including those of endangered species. Toxins and other chemicals would need to be transported in and out of the facility along transit routes, putting many surrounding towns at risk if a toxic spill were to occur.

Sacred areas where Native peoples have retreated since time immemorial would be cut down to make space to house toxic slump ponds, roads, pipelines and cooling towers. Many Native peoples, lawmakers, investment companies, homeowners, ranchers, fishing enthusiasts, environmentalists and other citizens have consistently opposed this project. Ironically, the geothermal energy extracted would be peddled as "green energy", creating a false image of health and safety. Clearly, geothermal energy as proposed by this project is not simply trapping steam or mining hot water from natural geysers; it is much more environmentally destructive and would impact the health of all life in the area. It would *definitely* desecrate the sacredness of the Medicine Lake Highlands area.

Many Native and non-Native peoples refuse to allow such "development", and are putting words to strategic action.

During this year's protest more than 200

marched with strength in opposition to Calpine's destructive plans for the sacred and environmentally important Highlands. Native students of all ages sacrificed their class time to attend this important demonstration and educational session. These students along with Native activists, environmentalists and other concerned citizens marched from Cesar Chavez Park to Calpine's Headquarters. The demonstration was led by a strong Native drum group, representatives of the Pit River Nation carrying the Pit River Nation Unity Banner, and powerful young men capable of carrying the traditional Pit River silver and black fox flags. Native leaders burned sacred sage, cedar and root. The smoke encircled the marchers and permeated the Calpine building. Bull horns were used to increase the volume of words spoken by protesters to ensure Calpine staff and shareholders as well as state and federal government officials heard the demands to immediately drop all plans to desecrate and destroy the natural state of the Highlands for geothermal energy production. The protest was also webcast and covered on television, radio and in newspapers to ensure the information reached a wide audience. A letter-writing campaign was used prior to the protest to inform Calpine and its governmental backers to not only back off of its plans for the Highlands, but to completely back out of this sacred place forever. The federal government, in particular, must ban such development out of respect for American Indian religious and traditional land use rights and to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility to the tribal governments of the area and act in their best interests.

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