

For Immediate Release

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TRIBAL MEMBERS DEMAND COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF OTTER CREEK

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LAME DEER -- Yesterday over 170 Northern Cheyenne tribal members submitted detailed and substantive comments to the DEQ asking for a thorough, transparent and comprehensive study of the proposed Otter Creek coal mine in southeastern Montana.

“We believe our community will bear the brunt of the negative impacts from the Otter Creek mine. Sacrificing the land, water, animal and plant life for mining and money is not worth what our ancestors fought and gave their life. Our group is worried about the crime, accidents, drugs and other social issues that come along with boomtowns that our Tribe is not equipped to handle. We are being asked to deal with this so that a transnational corporation can make billions of dollars shipping coal to Asia,” said Tom Mexican Cheyenne.

The proposed mine’s proximity to the border of the reservation is of particular concern to Northern Cheyenne tribal members. Otter Creek valley, used for thousands of years by tribal peoples contains cultural, historic and burial sites important to the Cheyenne people and many other Plains Tribes and serves as important wildlife habitat for hundreds of wildlife species.

“To preserve language culture and identity you must protect air, land, and water, that’s who we are. Without language and land we are not who we say we are,” said Phillip Whiteman Jr., Northern Cheyenne Sweet Medicine Chief.

People have watched as North Dakota reservations have experienced dramatic increases in crime, traffic accidents and cultural conflict from nearby oil development. When coupled with environmental impacts of air pollution, water pollution, decreased wildlife populations, many tribal members now are opposing the development of the mine. In addition, many young Northern Cheyenne are being trained in renewable energy.

“A group of us are going to get certified in solar voltaic installation on Pine Ridge at the Red Cloud Renewable Energy Center this month and a couple of us will go on to a larger installation project in Colorado this summer. We want a different future for our children. Coal is a dead end for us,” said Vanessa Braided Hair, Northern Cheyenne wildlands firefighter.

The Oglala Sioux Tribal President submitted a letter to DEQ yesterday in solidarity with the Northern Cheyenne citizens who submitted comments.

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