



Select Page



Thacker Pass Lithium Mine in Humboldt County, NV

September 8 2021

International Lithium Group Stands in Solidarity with Peehee mu'huh / Thacker Pass Communities

YLNM (Yes to Life No to Mining) Lithium Group stands in solidarity with the People of Red Mountain,

the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe, the agricultural communities within Orovada and Kings River Valley, and all people on the frontline facing harm from the Thacker Pass mine project. We demand that Peehee Mu'huh / Thacker Pass—and the whole communities whose well-being are inextricably connected to it—not be sacrificed for alleged global warming mitigation against their will through the breaking of ground at the site. As the People of Red Mountain and members of the agricultural communities have articulated many times in many different forms, the construction and operation of the Thacker Pass lithium mine would cause irreparable harm to a culturally significant area/sacred site on traditional Paiute and Shoshone land, to agricultural livelihoods, and to individual and communal ways of life. YLNM lithium group comes from a variety of perspectives and lived experiences regarding the already-existing harms of lithium extraction on communities worldwide, and we stand in solidarity with the communities that would be affected by the Thacker Pass mine in asking the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to prevent ground-breaking operations and in demanding that affected communities be respected as holding complete right to withhold consent for the mine.

YLNM Lithium is an international working group of individuals from around the world who are directly facing the harms of lithium extraction or are a part of organizations working alongside these frontline affected communities. We constitute a solidarity network for sharing experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and resources among those affected by lithium extraction in many different places around the globe. We are currently made up of folks from Chile, Serbia, Portugal, Nevada, California, Australia, and Spain. We share a commitment towards advocating for the respect and well-being of all communities and ecosystems, peoples and other natural beings (non human others), facing lithium mines. We envision a transformation which is centered around and guided by the prioritization of community rights, needs, and well-being.

Sign-ons (From within YLNM network):

Organization: Salva la Selva; Name: Guadalupe Rodríguez; Location: Spai

Organization: Earth Thrive; Name: Zoe Lujic; Community: Zastitimo Jadar & Radjevinu; Location: UK/Serbia Serbia, Jadar & Radjevina

Organization: Center for Interdisciplinary Environmental Justice- Decolonize4Climate; Locations: Mexico, California, Texas

Organization: Rettet den Regenwald/Rainforest Rescue; Name: Klaus Schenck; Location: Germany

Organization: Zaštito Jadar i Rađevinu/Protect Jadar & Radjevina; Name: Marija Alimpic; Location: Loznica, Serbia (opposing Rio Tinto's lithium mine in Jadar, Western Serbia)

Organization: Denver Justice and Peace Committee (DJPC); Name: Rebeca Zuniga; Location: Denver, U.S

Organization: Observatorio Plurinacional de Salares Andinos (OPSAL); Name: Ramón Morales Balcázar

/ Verónica Gostissa; Location: Chile, Argentina & Bolivia

Organization: Igapo Project; Name: Corinne Ferrarons; Location: France

Organization: Latin American Network of Women Defenders of Social and Environmental Rights;
Name: Eva Vázquez; Location: Latin America

Organizations: OPSAL & Colectivo de DDHH Empoderate; Name: Vivian Lagrava; Location: Bolivia

Organizations: Agricultores Quebrada de Soncor & OPSAL ; Name: Rudecindo Espíndola Araya;
Location: Chile

Organizations: OPSAL & Comunidad Colla de Copiapó; Name: Elena Rivera Cardoso; Location: Chile;

Name: Patricia Marconi; Location: Argentina; Organization: OPSAL and Fundación Yuchan;

Name: Bárbara Jerez Henríquez; Organization: OPSAL (Plurinational Observatory of Andean Salt Flats);
Location: Chile

Name: Verónica Gostissa; Organization: OPSAL (Plurinational Observatory of Andean Salt Flats) ;
Location: Argentina

Name: Jacqueline Quintana; Organization: OPSAL (Plurinational Observatory of Andean Salt Flats);
Location: Chile

Name: Ingrid Garcés; Organization: OPSAL; Location: Chile

Name: Mirko Nikolić ; Postdoc, Institute for Culture & Society, Linköping University Location:
Sweden/Serbia; E-mail: mirkon@tuta.io

Name: Hannibal Rhoades; Beyond Extractivism Lead, The Gaia Foundation; Location: United Kingdom;
Email: hannibal@gaianet.org

Organization: DECOIN; Name: Carlos Zorrilla; Location: Intag, Ecuador; Note: "From Ecuador's cloud
forests under threat of large-scale copper mining, we support your struggle"

Organization: Biofuelwatch; Name: Frances Howe and Gary Hughes; Location: UK/USA

Sign ons (beyond YLNM network):

Organization: MiningWatch Canada; Name: Jamie Kneen; Location: Canada

Organization: Great Basin Resource Watch; Name: John Hadder; Location: United States, Nevada

Organization: Environmental Assembly of the Jujuy Province ; Name: Nestor Omar Ruiz; Location: Jujuy,
Argentina

Organization: European Network on Indigenous Peoples (ENIP); Name: Andy Whitmore ; Location:

collective from various European countries

Organization: London Mining Network; Name: Richard Solly ; Location: London

Name: Dr. James J. A. Blair ; Location: Pomona, California, USA

Name: Cristián Flores Fernández ; IRI THESys & Geography Department at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; Location: Berlin, Germany

Organization: Earthworks; Name: Raquel Dominguez; Location: United States

Organization: Human Rights and Environment ; Name: (Chairwoman) Sr. Patricia L. Ryan; Location: Puno, Peru

Organization: People & Planet; Name: J Clarke; Location/country: United Kingdom

download statement here

June 8, 2021

Current Status

In January 2021, the Bureau of Land Management issued a Record of Decision approving the Thacker Pass Mine. The mine was fast-tracked, meaning the decision for its approval along with the analysis required under the National Environmental Policy Act for it, were completed on a much shorter timeframe than is typical for the permitting of a mine in the United States. The company has failed to receive community consent for the project from local communities. This quick analysis and decision for approval were made despite deep concerns from local communities, as well as an array of wildlife and other issues. The severe environmental impacts the project could have were also not properly analyzed in the decision to permit the mine. For these reasons, Great Basin Resource Watch filed a lawsuit alongside the Western Watersheds Project, Basin and Range Watch, and Wildlands Defense on February 26th, 2021, over the Thacker Pass lithium mine. Our media release about the legal challenge can be found [here](#), and the filing itself can be found [here](#).

Then, on May 27th, 2021, we [filed alongside our allies for a preliminary injunction](#) in the Federal District Court in Reno, asking the court to prohibit construction of the Thacker Pass lithium mine. More information about the preliminary injunction can be found in the press release [here](#).

Great Basin Resource Watch filed a lawsuit alongside the Western Watersheds Project, Basin and Range Watch, and Wildlands Defense has also filed a [joint stipulation](#) on June 8, 2021 agreeing to a revised legal briefing schedule for the preliminary injunction:

1. Neither Lithium Nevada nor Federal Defendants will conduct any ground disturbance activities in the Project area in connection with the Thacker Pass Project as challenged in Plaintiffs' Complaint before July 29, 2021.

2. This agreement does not limit BLM's authority to manage public lands in accordance with any authorizing statute or implementing regulation.

As for the state level permitting of Thacker Pass, an air quality permit and water pollution control permit are still required. Great Basin Resource Watch is going to be requesting that the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection hold a public hearing on these permits, and we encourage individuals to request this public hearing as well (since the agency is more likely to do so with requests from community members). If you would like to assist in this way, please reach out to chelsey@gbrw.org.

A reclamation bond must also be agreed upon before the company, Lithium Nevada, is able to break ground at the site. It is still uncertain when this reclamation bond will be set, but it is currently in the works.

About the Mine

The Thacker Pass project is a proposed lithium mine by Lithium Nevada Corp., located in Humboldt County just below the Montana Mountains (photo above features the proposed site placement, with small green mounds from the company's activity in the foreground of the Montana Mountains). Lithium Nevada Corp. has plans for open pit mining as well as processing on site. It is estimated that the project will:

- disturb roughly 5,545 acres
- pump up to 3,250 gallons per minute of groundwater
- utilize 2,900 tons of acid per day at the on-site sulfuric acid plant
- produce several lithium products through an acid leach system
- lifetime of 41 years (could be extended with future expansion....which appears very possible, as the company holds a large number of other mining claims in the area)

Great Basin Resource Watch is primarily focused on ensuring accountability in the permitting of this lithium mine, making sure community concerns are addressed and sensitive areas in the region are protected. The Thacker Pass proposal comes in a time of many new attempts to mine materials, such as lithium, in Nevada to support renewable energy technology. Lithium Nevada planned all along to move through the permitting process quicker than is typical (known as streamlining) because of the presumed urgency of lithium required for these technologies. However, GBRW feels a commitment towards ensuring that communities' concerns and desires are respected and that the protection of land, water, air, and ecosystems are still being prioritized, even in mining necessary for creation of "green technologies." Thus, since Thacker Pass is in the first new wave of proposed lithium projects in Nevada and is streamlining for extraction of this green-tech material, GBRW understands the importance of monitoring the project and the precedent it is setting for how the influx of mining for

these green-tech materials is done in the near future.

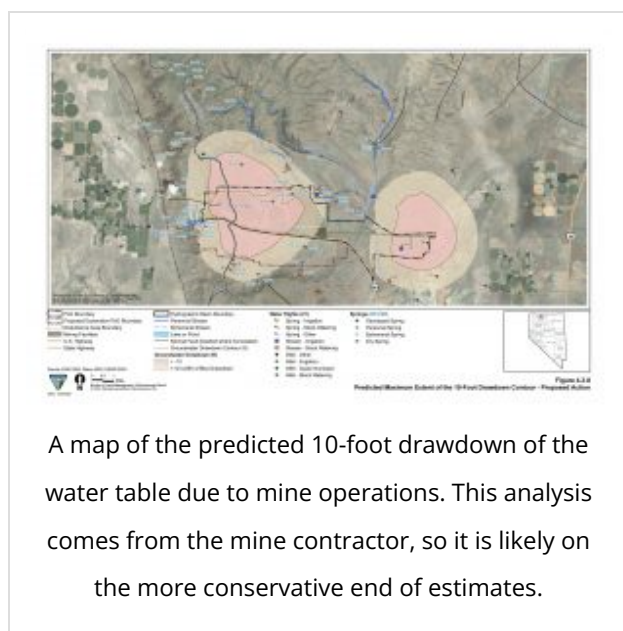
Beyond this, GBRW is also particularly focused on Thacker Pass for community support reasons—as it has become apparent that it is a controversial project that has failed to receive the affected communities' consent and to properly consult with the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe.

We have actively been following the Thacker Pass mine through its federal permitting process and have submitted many comments on the technical aspects of the mine over the past year. This includes scoping comments and draft Environmental Impact Statement comments. The official scoping comments we submitted together can be accessed by [selecting here](#). Our comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement can be accessed by [selecting here](#).

Main Concerns

Water and Air

Although the 3,250 gallons per minute of groundwater that Lithium Nevada plans to pump for their operations is relatively small compared to other mines in the state (such as Long Canyon Gold Mine), it is a concern because both the Kings Valley and Quinn Valley water basins where the water will be pumped from appear to already be over-allocated. This means the amount of water granted for use in water rights is greater than the basin's estimated ability to recharge. People in the ranching and farming communities in Orovada and Kings River Valley are very concerned that pumping caused by the mine would affect their domestic wells. In addition, potential pollution to both water and air from the processing facility were not thoroughly addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.



Sensitive Wildlife Species

There are serious concerns about the project affecting wildlife, particularly sage grouse, big horn sheep, pronghorn, golden eagles, Lahontan cutthroat trout, and an endemic spring snail species (the Kings River Pyrg). The area is vital habitat for these sensitive species, especially just north of the proposed mine area in the Montana Mountains (where there is potential for expansion later). Lithium Nevada did state publicly that the company has no plans to expand there. However, they and the parent company **still hold mining claims** all throughout the Montana Mountains, and the parent company Lithium Americas has not made any promises to avoid mining there. Furthermore, the community was also extremely concerned about an expansion into the Montana Mountains for various other reasons. Even if Lithium Americas does not expand into the Montana Mountains, the proposed site is very close to habitat that has been identified by the Nevada Department of Wildlife as significant for sage grouse in the state. Although Lithium Nevada has spoken about plans for sagebrush restoration to help mitigate the affect on sage grouse, the mine operations will sever an area that has been identified as priority habitat for the sage grouse, which could be absolutely devastating to that population as a whole and their ability to survive. The mine would fragment “essential irreplaceable habitat” for sage-grouse in already vulnerable populations, by allowing destructive development in sage-grouse habitats that exceeds limits established in the Resource Management Plan.

Inadequate Public Process and Lack of Community

Consent There has been clear lack of community consent for the mine from both members of the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe and from the agricultural communities of Orovada and Kings River Valley. Many people at the February 2020 public meeting in Orovada (and subsequent public processes in the past year) were unclear on the proposal, stated the project had changed too many times, and expressed mistrust towards Lithium Nevada. Meaningful public comment cannot occur if the project is not well understood. People also felt as though there was not enough time for making comments. Compounding this is the fact that both the company and the BLM have streamlined the permitting process. Lithium Nevada is quick to state how important it is to get lithium production started rapidly in order to meet expected demands—but such speed should not come at the cost of the public process or community consent.

Inadequate Tribal Consultation

The Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe was not adequately consulted during the official Environmental Impact Statement process for the Thacker Pass mine, and major concerns have been raised about cultural resources and improper consultation since the Record of Decision.

The “treatment plan” for cultural mitigation of sites was developed without consulting the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe, which is in violation of Fort McDermitt’s rights under Section 106 that requires identification and mitigation of cultural sites to involve the affected Tribe/s.

recognize Thacker Pass when they are done”

Call for focusing on recycling before new extraction: “it is the most dirty way to produce green energy”
“Green energy should not prop up a wasteful lifestyle. There should be more effort given to Lithium recycling”

Resident of Kings River Valley expressing frustrating over fast-tracking of the project: “all of a sudden the BLM seems to be in a hurry to get the EIS done for NLC”

Incredibly powerful quote from one of the resident closest to the proposed mine: “NLC’s claim that there are no residential areas within 19 miles of the mine, my home is approximately 7 miles from the mine site, and there are homes closer than mine. NLC has categorized our farming and ranching community as industrial, while we do have equipment on our farms and ranches, we also have families, grandchildren we are raising here in the ‘industrial area.’” “Kings River Valley is one of the most pictureque places in the state. It will be desecrated by NLC, when all’s said and done, they go back to Canada, and Kings River is left in ruins. They won’t bring back the springs or pond that are dried up, or the rock formations that will be blasted away, the wildlife that has left the area because of all the activity going on in and around the mine. We won’t recognize Thacker Pass when they are done. Our community feels like they don’t have a voice in this matter, ‘it’s progress and growth, you can’t stop it’, well maybe so, but I at least am going to go down screaming”

Community members talking about mistrust of the company and the community’s mistreatment by the company:

-this “mine will devastate the rural lifestyle of all the residents of Orovida and Kings River Valley. I don’t believe the processing of this mineral is as safe as we are being told it is.”

-“credibility with me is lacking. And let me be clear, public trust is an important and substantive issue”

-“we understand that a groundwater model has been used to estimate the extent and magnitude of impacts, however the number of data points and duration of data collection makes the long-term conclusions suspect”

-“the COVID pandemic has made it extremely difficult for the public to participate in this scoping process”

-“The mine will have substantial direct financial impacts to my family by likely drying up springs, and dropping water tables under our private lands, which we rely on for water and forage for our cattle. They will backfill the mine with crushed waste rock that is naturally contaminated with toxins, which have a high probability of leaching into groundwater. The mine plans on burning massive amounts of sulfur 680,000 tons a year, in order to create sulfuric acid.”

Residents during a virtual community meeting with the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection:

-“a lot of us feel like this is not an appropriate project or an appropriate place for this project. But we are in a regulatory box where we need to comply with these particular requirements and not with

what is reasonable to us in our minds.” -“the explanations that were given to us, none of them involved what the risks to us are.”

Residents during a “Thacker Pass Concerned Citizens” community meeting:

-“how are they going to compensate for unintended consequences of their actions? If a disaster happens, how are they going to rectify that to the community? Because they never put anything in writing. If something tragic happens, how are they going to address it?”

-“if they are going to come in and change the way my whole community looks...I’m not going to stand here when someone comes in with a vague plan to change my way of life and not have a voice in it. I want to be able to live with it [the consequences of the mine], that’s my problem. It’s my home. I was born here. It’s where I was raised. I want to raise my kids here.”

-[on concerns about water quality] “We need an initial test on that; you can’t test after they’ve started” • [on concerns about expansion] “we want to get in writing that they won’t extend the life of the mine”

-“they’re going to take agriculture’s water, and it will never go back to agriculture”

PDF of community voices quote collage from over the past year and a half can be downloaded [here](#).

Great Basin Resource Watch, One Source Network, the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, and Patagonia hosted a webinar centered around Thacker Pass community voices on May 13th, 2021. A recording of the webinar can be found [here](#).

Some community concerns are also written about in our blog post from the public scoping meeting that was held in Orovada in early February 2020. If you are interested in hearing specifics, you can do so in the blog post [here](#) (following this link). More in-depth community concerns and perspective can be found in the sections below as well.



The project's groundwater pumping could affect existing stock water wells, many of which are depended upon for ranching



The project will remove mature sagebrush, some of which is taller than a majority of people



The quiet road between Orovada and Thacker Pass site could become the heart of an industrial area, reflecting the ways the project could largely change dynamics for the region and people living there

Public Process Hindered in Mine Permitting during COVID-19 Pandemic

Great Basin Resource Watch is additionally concerned about the ways the public process has been hindered in permitting for the Thacker Pass site—especially considering how controversial the proposed project is and the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is impeding on the community's ability to meet and deliberate about it. Throughout Nevada, COVID-19 has understandably made it nearly impossible for many community members to come together to discuss their concerns and perspectives, as well as share information with one another, on proposed mine projects. If people do not have the ability to come together to have these conversations and arrive at a collective understanding of a proposed mine, it is nearly impossible for a project to acquire meaningful community consent. Furthermore, accessing the technical documents needed for understanding a proposed mine project and its impacts can be difficult for people, especially in rural areas, who do not have consistent internet to locate these documents electronically and who, because of COVID, can no longer go in person to access this information. In these ways, the current pandemic has put many people and communities in positions where they cannot fairly give their consent for projects. Despite this, the permitting for many mine projects—including Thacker Pass—are continuing as usual.

Because of our deep concern about this, we sent a letter to the state director of the BLM about the ways the public process is being hindered and requesting that the process be delayed until the community members are able to meet and meaningfully deliberate about the project. The letter can be found [here](#). If you would like to also send a letter about this, you are more than welcome to borrow any part of ours that is useful.

To stay updated about Thacker Pass and other major work we are doing, please join Great Basin Resource Watch's mailing list. To do so, just email chelsey@gbrw.org with "mailing list" in the subject line. For any additional information or technical documents, also feel free to email chelsey@gbrw.org or john@gbrw.org.



Copyright, Great Basin Resource Watch.