

The #NoDAPL Movement – March on Albuquerque

Written by Story and photos by Tiana Gibbs Sun Editor
Friday, 18 November 2016 07:55



ALBUQUERQUE – On an unseasonably warm fall morning, a crowd of more than 500 people gathered outside the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers building Nov. 15.

A diverse group, they assembled with a unified purpose: To protest the Dakota Access Pipeline

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as part of a nationwide display of solidarity for the people of Standing Rock, S.D.

The protest, which was organized by 350 New Mexico, drew support from numerous other local organizations including The Sierra Club, Food & Water Watch and Power Through Peace.

Since Sept. 9, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and sympathizers to their cause have camped on the site of the proposed DAPL, halting its progress. Energy Transfer Partners plans to tunnel under Lake Oahe, a water source for the Standing Rock reservation and reservoir of the Missouri River, to lay an oil pipeline.

To do that, however, they require an easement from the Army Corps. The ongoing DAPL protests in Standing Rock have become a major rallying point for environmentalists and those concerned for tribal sovereignty and the safety of the region's water supply.

One of the organizers for the Albuquerque protest, Eleanor Bravo, a senior organizer for Food & Water Watch, gave a passion-filled statement to protestors.

"This is climate sacrifice," she said. "It's not right. We will not stand for it any longer."

Bravo had recently returned from Standing Rock and spent some of her speaking time describing the conditions of the protest camps, where hundreds of arrests have been made and protestors have endured rubber bullets, pepper spray and other aggressive tactics from a militarized police force.

But she also made it clear that this issue was larger than Standing Rock itself.

"This pipeline fight has become the icon for all pipeline fights for this country and throughout the world," Bravo said.

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WATER IS LIFE

A major theme running through the protest was concern for the safety of the water supply, which many claim could become contaminated by the pipeline, leading to a water crisis like that currently going on in Flint, Mich. or the 2015 mine spill in the Animas River of Farmington, NM.

Hand-made signs bearing slogans like “People Over Pipelines” and “Water is Life” set the tone for the gathering, which included chanting, prayer, drumming, song, speeches, and a symbolic march.

A former Tiwa language instructor, Narpuff Abeita of Isleta Pueblo, led the chant “Pah Wah Wem – Water Is Life.”

The 69-year-old said that she was here for the safety of the water throughout the country, which she fears will be compromised by oil drilling and fracking.

“This is so important for me, because I am a great grandmother,” she said. “I have 18 grandchildren, six great grandchildren, and water is life.”

Petitions circulated through the crowd to take action against fracking in New Mexico, including Greater Chaco and Rio Rancho.

Elaine Cimino, organizer for the grassroots group “Stop Fracking the Rio Grande Valley,” explained that the massive number of oil drilling operations throughout New Mexico could have a severe impact on the environment for generations.

“We really need to rethink the idea of fracking in New Mexico,” she said, urging concerned citizens to stand together and take action.

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These sentiments were echoed by many of the activists gathered at the protest. Marlon Shorty, a Gallup resident with relatives currently in Standing Rock, expressed concerns for the future of Chaco Canyon.

“Whatever starts there, will end up here too,” he said, in reference to oil development in the Dakotas. “This snake has a long tail, a big head, no heart and no soul.”

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY THREATENED?

In addition to water safety and ecological concerns, many protestors also came to stand for tribal sovereignty. The DAPL would cut through the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, just as many oil wells throughout New Mexico are on or near tribal lands. Signs reading “Honor Our Treaties” were held alongside American flags.

Reports of police brutality and excessive force in Standing Rock have fueled passion for the cause among many. However, in spite of the hundreds of arrests made in South Dakota, a prevailing message of the Nov. 15 gathering was a need for peaceful, nonviolent opposition to the pipeline.

In Albuquerque, the protest was overseen by both Albuquerque Police Department officers and the Department of Homeland Security. One officer, who declined to identify himself for the press, remarked that this was “the most peaceful protest [he] had seen in a long time.”

The nationwide day of protest followed on the heels of a Nov. 14 announcement that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would delay their decision to grant an easement to Energy Transfer Partners, delaying progress on the pipeline.

Protestors hope that by placing continued pressure on the Army Corps to deny easement to ETP, the DAPL project can be rerouted or halted entirely. In total, more than 36,000 people joined in protests across the country at Army Corps buildings and outside of banks that provide financial support to ETP.

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Protest organizers urge concerned citizens to call the White House at (202) 456-1111 to demand President Obama to take action to shut down the DAPL decisively, before President-elect Donald Trump takes office in January.

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