



THE UNIVERSE IS OUR HOLY BOOK

- The Earth our Genesis
 - The Sky our sacred scroll
 - The Animals our teachers
 - The Mountains our prophets
 - The Winds our equations
 - The Birds our prayers
 - The Flowers our miracle
 - The Sun our source
 - The Moon our messenger
 - The Waters our testaments
 - The World our study
 - The Great Mystery our Grandfather and Grandmother, indeed Our Beginning and our End.
- (Excerpt from poem "The Universe is Our Holy Book" by Native American scholar, Jack Forbes)

When environmental philosopher **Derick Jensen** asked the late Native scholar **Vine Deloria** what the fundamental difference is between Western and indigenous ways of life, Mr. Deloria answered, "I think the primary thing is that Indians experience and relate to a living universe, whereas Western philosophy, especially science, reduces things to objects, whether they're alive or not."

For thirteen regional tribes, and in particular, the Hopi and Navajo, the San Francisco Peaks is not just a geological feature, an inanimate pile of dirt. It is a living entity, which plays a significant role to their spiritual identity. At a Planning and Zoning public hearing in 1974, Navajo medicine man **Fred Kaye** said, "The mountain ... is a teacher. It teaches people the way of life. If the white man desecrates, ruins, or develops the mountain, its teachings will be lost to the people."

In his book, *God is Red*, Mr. Deloria teases out many more fundamental differences between these two opposing worldviews. "The Indian is confronted with a bountiful earth in which all things and experiences have a role to play ... The Hopi for example, revere not only the lands on which they live but the animals with which they have a particular relationship." Animals, plants, and mountains all play integral roles in the spiritual lives of Native people. Contrast this with a worldview created through the idea that man receives dominion over the rest of creation, and the results are polarizing. And for the Earth, the results have and continue to be devastating.

"The implications" of this difference, as Mr. Deloria continues, "are immense. If you see the world around you as made up of objects for you to manipulate and exploit, it is inevitable that you will destroy the world by attempting to control it. Perceiving the world as lifeless also robs you of the richness, beauty, and wisdom of participating in the larger pattern of life."

At the conclusion of a nine-year struggle to preserve the natural integrity of the San Francisco Peaks from those who sought to build a luxury ski and golf condo resort at Hart Prairie, the *Daily Sun* observed that, "It was as if an entire area breathed a giant sigh of happiness—and relief."

This great sense of relief, however, was short lived.

Less than a year after **Summit Properties** sold its land parcels to the Forest Service, **Northland Recreation** purchased the lease to operate SnowBowl in the summer of 1977, and immediately submitted a plan to expand their facilities. Owner, **Norm Johnson** sought to build 5 new lifts, a new lodge, expand parking lots, and clear an additional 117 acres for new ski runs.

There was a bit of a delay in response to Northland on the part of the Forest Service, as **Jimmy Carter** had just signed the **American Indian Religious Freedom Act** in August of 1978. "I must be sure my decision complies with all laws ... it would be unwise to make a decision prior to complete interpretation and understanding of the new law," Coconino Forest Supervisor **Michael Kerrick** told *Qua' Toqti*,

a newspaper circulated on the Hopi and Navajo reservations.

The act specified that "it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions...including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites."

This new legislation was a very encouraging sign to many regional Native people who assumed the Act legitimized their spiritual identity with the Peaks in the eyes of United States law, thus it would now be illegal for the Forest Service to consider any development on lands recognized as sacred to so many people. Arizona Representative **Stuart Udall**, who sponsored the act, claimed, "it has no teeth," that it merely "says to our managers of public lands that [Native people] ought to be encouraged to use these places."

As the Forest Service's decision was still up in the air, Arizona Senator **Barry Goldwater** visited Big Mountain on the Navajo Reservation, where he was confronted about his position on the Peaks. He told the crowd, according to *The Navajo Times*, that he had written to President Jimmy Carter, asking for his help in establishing the Peaks as a "sacred area," stating, "I want to put a stop to it ... I don't think it [the Peaks] should ever be disturbed."

Later in the article documenting his visit, Goldwater seemed to recant his position on the Peaks by saying, "There is nothing we can do about the SnowBowl." Any ambiguity about his position was cleared up in a statement he made a month later, voicing his support for development. "... It would not involve any tremendous amount of acreage and doesn't actually involve a portion of the mountain that the Navajos and Hopis have shown a great deal of interest in," apparently choosing to ignore the clear and consistent Native voices calling to protect the integrity of the entire mountain range.

To add insult to injury, on February 27, 1979, Coconino Forest Supervisor **Michael Kerrick** approved Northland's plans to further expand the facilities at SnowBowl. "After considering all effects, the Forest Service prefers development because legal requirements have been met, public sentiment favors development, environmental effects can be mitigated, it benefits the

economy, and is consistent with Forest Service policies." The Hopi Tribal Administration regarded the decision as "... totally without regard to the religious values and concerns of Hopis."

Following the Forest Services decision, a meeting was held in Washington DC by the **Task Force on the American Indian Religious Freedom Act**. Speaking on behalf of **Richard Wilson** and the **Navajo Medicine Men's Association**, attorney **Doug Wall** emphasized "that implementation of the proposed [plan to expand facilities at SnowBowl] amounted to a sacrilegious gouging of the body and face of what the Navajos believed to be a living and holy deity."

At the meeting, **Abbott Sequaptewa**, Chairman of the Hopi Tribe, introduced two Hopi elders from the **Kachina Clan**. One of them, High Priest **Herman Y. Lewis**, was the only Native person to speak at the meeting. His statements were translated and appeared in a memorandum following the meeting.

"He and his clan possessed stewardship over the San Francisco Peaks because the Kachina people live there. The spirit people live within the mountain's interior where there is the sacred shrine or kiva. The Hopis deposit offerings on the slopes of the Peaks at a secret but specified place. The Peaks, he noted, regulated the ceremonial calendar of the Hopis as well as their entire lives and must be kept inviolate."

Initially, the decision was appealed by **Regional Forester M.J. Hassel**, who argued that the present facilities should simply be repaired and improved, but not expanded. Later that year, **Forest Service Chief Max Peterson** upheld the Forest Service's initial decision, stating, "Neither the First Constitutional Amendment nor the American Indian Religious Freedom Act assures believers of Native American Religions that other members of society must act and behave in conformance with their beliefs."

When the American Indian Religious Freedom Act failed to adequately defend the Peaks from further desecration, the same group sued **Interior Secretary John Block**, citing the **Endangered Species Act**. In a letter to Mr. Block, outlining the many violations any further expansion would cause to the ecological integrity of the mountain, the Wilson's attorney stated, "Since the San Francisco Peaks are ecologically unique, any endangered species habitat that

occurs on this 'island' must be considered especially critical and irreplaceable." The statement went on to cite scores of endangered species of plants, some of which are found nowhere else in the world, that would be directly impacted by the proposed expansion.

While awaiting word from the US Supreme Court, expansion began. In 1982, the Hart Prairie chair lift is built and at the end of the year, **Fairfield Communities** purchased the SnowBowl area. In early 1983, the Supreme Court officially declined to hear the Wilson's case, affirming the lower court's decision to move forward with the expansion, resulting in construction of the Hart Prairie Lodge, the Sunset chairlift, and the transfer of the rope tow back to Hart Prairie.

Arizona Snowbowl Limited Partnership bought the ski area in 1992 and immediately expanded the Hart Prairie Lodge, added a guest service office, a rental shop, and a children's ski school. Not content with those improvements, SnowBowl General Manager **JR Murray** revealed plans to add 66 acres of new runs and yet another chairlift less than five years later.

Around the same time, **Jim Mehen**, one of the principal developers of **Forest Highlands**, an exclusive gated community on the outskirts of Flagstaff, submitted a proposal to the County Board of Supervisors requesting that a rare wetlands area on the Peaks surrounding **Dry Lake** be rezoned for development. The resemblance of this plan to Summit Properties plan to develop Hart Prairie into SnowBowl Village is uncanny.

Mr. Mehen proposed **Flagstaff Ranch Golf Club**, a would-be gated community consisting of 300 luxury homes and a golf course. Like the opposition to the development of Hart Prairie nearly two decades earlier, Native people, environmentalists, and many citizens were outraged. Between the two proposed projects, it seemed like 1974 all over again.

Proponents of development pulled out the same rhetorical tactics. Opponents of Flagstaff Ranch Golf Club, according to Mr. Mehen must "... represent a small but vocal minority. We're trying to get to the silent majority." This sounded eerily familiar to what Summit Properties officer and SnowBowl manager **Richard Mample** said in 1974: "The outspoken vocal minority are threatening in my opinion to do irreparable harm to the people of Coconino County in Flagstaff."

Furthermore, in the same way that **Bruce Leadbetter** dismissed Native American religious arguments and environmental concerns in the 70s as "emotional, having no rational basis," and that opponents were simply not aware of "the facts," Mr. Mehen said in 1997 "The absence of facts and the glut of emotionally-charged and misleading remarks is disturbing."

Summit Properties lawyer, **Warren Ridge**, and the Forest Service proclaimed in the early 70s that religious rights would be unimpeded, and even facilitated, by the ski lifts. Citing the low-income service jobs that would be created, Mr. Ridge said: "Perhaps some of our Indian friends will welcome the opportunity to work closer to the San Francisco Peaks."

Similarly, both Mr. Murray and Mr. Mehen explained how further expansion and development would actually improve the experience of the Peaks. In 1997, Mr. Mehen told the *Daily Sun*, regarding his proposal to develop a gated community at Dry Lake, "With the creation of lakes and ponds and vegetated area, the development will have a positive effect on many of the area's wildlife." On rezoning of Dry Lakes, Mr. Mehen said, "I want to make Dry Lake something that is more natural, that is a more productive wetlands."

Similarly, just a few days later, Mr. Murray said

of the proposed alterations of current ski runs, "What we're trying to do," Murray explained, "is get rid of the straight lines and try to make it look more natural."

In 1978, **Michael Brown**, from the **Sacred Mountain Defense Fund**, looked at the ski slopes and saw scars on the mountain. In his book, *Leave These Peaks Undisturbed!*, he said, "How consistent are ski slope scars? They do mar an image of beauty, an image which I measure myself against. This ability to reflect is very important. I can imagine myself standing up on Humphrey's Peak looking at town when I am actually in town ... a beautiful perspective to have. But, if the mountain were to be further slashed by ski slopes, I would first have to experience the pain of these slashes. The pain would get in the way of this clear perception."

Realizing he was beat before he even got started, Mr. Mehen withdrew his application for rezoning in November 1997.

All of these parallels should make one thing clear. When, in 1978, **Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter McDonald** said, "A thousand men can look at a mountain and see a thousand different mountains," he couldn't have been more right.

Developers, skiers, environmentalists, the chamber of commerce, Phoenixians, newspapers, citizens, and government organizations all see a different mountain according to their experience of it. Some see great, expansive beauty, or a complex and unique eco-system, while others see recreation, or money and power.

The mountain the Navajo, Hopi, and other Native people see, however, is consistently dismissed, disregarded, and disrespected. With each hearing, proposal and subsequent expansion, they are further alienated from their sacred lands in the name of a false sense of progress and a very real sense of entitlement, which places property rights above human rights.

In 1974, at the height of Summit's hearing, Mr. McDonald, apparently frustrated with the blatant racism directed toward him and other Native people, remarked, "If you wear your feather, make Kachina dolls, weave rugs and pose for tourists, you are a good Indian, but if you exercise your rights as citizens, you are a bad Indian."

That was 35 years ago, and it seems little has changed. Much too often is asked, what is best for skiers and the economy? Seldom heard are questions like, what is best for Native people who look to the mountain for spiritual guidance and cultural identity? Or what is best for the mountain itself?

One woman wrote an editorial to the *Navajo Hopi Observer* after Mr. Mehen withdrew his application, with some questions of her own. "How many more generations of energetic young Native Americans will have their way of life ignored whenever it is inconvenient for the 'dominant' culture? How many more will learn the bitter truth that the sacred dollar will take precedence over even the most sacred sites of their particular tribes?"

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