



## 'FUTURE OF ENERGY ON THE COLORADO PLATEAU' FORUM HEATS UP AS HOPI TRIBE IS EXCLUDED AND THE EPA IS GRILLED; COAL FIRED NAVAJO GENERATING STATION UNDER SCRUTINY

BY KYLE BOGGS

On Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, a forum was held at the Museum of Northern Arizona to discuss "The Energy Future of the Colorado Plateau," though the only topic under discussion was the future of the coal fired **Navajo Generating Station** (NGS), located near Page, on the Navajo Nation. The forum drew nearly 100 Northern Arizona residents, and one by one, their messages were clear: they do not want a future powered by coal.

Northern Arizona University professor emeritus of civil & environmental engineering, **William Auberle**, led the forum. Mr. Auberle framed the forum with a brief history of the energy needs of the Colorado Plateau. He spoke of the rapidly growing cities of the Southwest such as Phoenix and Las Vegas and how in the 1960s and 70s, those cities "looked to the Colorado Plateau to support water and energy needs." Those needs were supported at the time with what technologies were available in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

"But today we're not building new dams; we're not building new coal plants — in part because we're running out of coal, but the need is the same," Mr. Auberle continued, looking forward, "the technology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should not be part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century," he said to those in audience, most of whom nodded in agreement. He then spoke of the future energy capacity of the Colorado Plateau. "The wind blows harder in the mountain passes of western Arizona on the way to California. The sun shines very brightly in the Sonoran and Mohave Deserts of Arizona. These energy sources are in the backyards of Vegas and Phoenix," he said. "Both instances are closer to the need of electricity than the Navajo Generating Station."

In conclusion, just before he introduced **Kelly Barr, Environmental Manager for the Salt River Project**, who operates the NGS, Mr. Auberle said, "Now we embark on the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Needless to say, Ms. Barr did not drive up from Phoenix to talk about the future of renewable technologies on the Colorado Plateau. She came to talk about coal, about how the NGS would continue burning coal until at least 2044, "in an environmentally responsible way," she said.

Ms. Barr went on to provide an "Overview of BART," or "Best Available Retrofit Technology" for the NGS, proposed under the **Regional Haze Rule of the Clean Air Act** by the Environmental Protection Agency on February 5, 2013. The haze rule is specifically designed to promote visibility in the National Parks — in this case, Grand Canyon. Under BART, the NGS is obligated to implement retrofit technologies, such as "scrubbers" that will essentially filter out some pollutants such as nitrogen oxide emissions.

Detailed later by **David Palumbo**, Bureau of Reclamation Assistant Regional Director for the Lower Colorado Region, an alternative to BART was proposed on July 26, 2013. The proposal was organized by a group of NGS "stakeholders" known as the **Technical Work Group** (TWG). The TWG is composed of Salt River Project, the US Department of the Interior, the Navajo Nation, the Gila River Indian Community, Environmental Defense Fund, Western Resources Advocates, and the Central Arizona Water Conservation District. The proposal submitted by TWG as an alternative to BART essentially extends the time frame for compliance in exchange for greater emission reductions. Mr. Palumbo and Ms. Barr lauded the alternative as "better than BART" as it carries the potential for greater emissions cuts, which go beyond concerns of visibility, and begin to address health concerns, but also guarantees that coal will be burned through 2044 at least.

Suspiciously absent from the TWG is the Hopi Tribe, and this was not lost on the audience. "Why wasn't the Hopi Tribe invited?" asked one of several Hopi Tribal leaders sitting in the front. Ms. Barr responded that only those considered stakeholders were invited to be part of the TWG. The audience erupted, and Ms. Barr became visibly nervous when the man responded, "So you're saying the Hopi Tribe is not a stakeholder?"

**Stephen Etsitty**, Executive Director for the **Environmental Protection Agency** for the Navajo Nation, later came to the defense of Ms. Barr, stating that according to the US government, "Hopi is neutral on NGS," which infuriated several Hopi attendees. Hopi tribal

leaders passed out a letter sent to **Sally Jewell**, Secretary of the Interior, about these concerns in September, and have yet to receive a reply. In the letter to Secretary Jewell, Chairman of the Hopi Tribe, **Leroy Shingoitewa** detailed a meeting with **Letty Belin**, Counselor to the Deputy Secretary for the Department of the Interior, who reportedly told the tribe that the Department of the Interior "advanced the Hopi Tribe's interests in the development of the proposed SRP-alternative [to BART]."

Mr. Shingoitewa wrote that the scenario is "hard to imagine without any consultation with the Hopi Tribe." He went on to say that Ms. Belin stated to the Tribal Council that, "If Hopi was at the table, we knew there would be no agreement," that "SRP decided that Hopi should not participate," and that "SRP didn't want Hopi at the table." The tribe went on to claim that development of this alternative proposal without any involvement of the Hopi Tribe "represents a stark violation of the January 4, 2013 Joint Federal Statement" in which "the three Federal agencies expressly promised to work with NGS stakeholders, including the Hopi Tribe."

Other memorable moments from the forum came when Mr. Etsitty attempted to provide evidence of EPA's progress in the four-corners region, specifically regarding air quality. Mr. Etsitty's presentation of two charts in particular led to some heated exchanges from some astute audience members. His first slide was a map of the United States locating air pollution density. According to this chart, the east coast looked terribly polluted — virtually covered in red splotches designating the most polluted areas, and the four-corners area was crystal clear. One audience member spoke up, addressing the fact that the chart was tied to population density. "This illustration is incredibly misleading. It is tied to affects of air pollution on a population. 'New York has a population of, what, 5 million? Of course a chart linked to population is going to look much worse out there!" he said. "This chart reveals nothing about what plants emit the most pollution, and detracts from this conversation."

Other concerns from the audience reflected dissatisfaction with the term "air pollution."


"Air pollution is a category for many different compounds," another audience member stated. "What sort of emissions are you talking about here?" Another chart appeared to show a trend since 2005 of levels of sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide steadily decreasing.

"The Clean Air Act is working," Mr. Etsitty said enthusiastically. "Can I get an Amen?" From the audience an audible "no" echoed in response. To a chart Mr. Etsitty presented illustrating his point, an audience member responded, "Okay, those are two things. What about levels of carbon? Mercury?" he said.

Mr. Etsitty agreed the charts could be misleading and quickly distanced himself from them, saying he couldn't speak to the details of the chart. "This isn't our data," he said, to which the man who took issue with the first chart threw his hands up in the air, exclaiming, "But you're using this data to push your agenda!"

Toward the end of Mr. Etsitty's talk, when he prattled on about EPA programs and outreach, an audience member called him out for "tooting his own horn." She said, "This is supposed to be a forum on future of energy policy on the Colorado Plateau. What is your stance on fracking? What is your stance on Uranium?"

A cursory Internet search reveals that among the nation's 100 most polluting power plants, the NGS is one of the top ten. **Vickie Patton**, General Counsel and Clean Air Manager for **Environmental Defense Fund**, who spoke last, named the NGS and coal fired power plants in general as "one of the single greatest sources of climate pollution in the US" and specifically stated that "NGS is one of the biggest emitters of oxides of Nitrogen in the country."

*Public comments to the EPA on the alternative "better than BART" proposal are open until January 6, 2014.* 

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