

**TESTIMONY OF RACHEL JOSEPH
TRIBAL CHAIRWOMAN FOR THE LONE PINE PAIUTE-SHOSHONE TRIBE
ON
SACRED LANDS-COSO HOT SPRINGS
SENATE INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
JUNE 4, 2002**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, I am Rachel A. Joseph Chairwoman of the Lone Pine Paiute - Shoshone Tribe located on the Eastern side of the Sierra in Central California in the Owens Valley.

It is an honor and privilege to testify here today on behalf of my Tribe. I speak today not just on behalf of my Tribe but for Paiute and Shoshone, including my parents, who have prayed, worshiped and healed themselves at Coso Hot Springs. Coso Hot Springs are located on the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station in southeast California. The Coso Hot Springs have been visited and used by our people and other local Native Americans for time immemorial. Our elders tell us of the healing power of the warm Coso water and mud and how that healing power is no longer the same.

In 1947, the Department of the Navy acquired Coso Hot Springs through condemnation. Coso Hot Springs and the immediate area were believed to be rich in geothermal energy and plans to tap this energy were initiated in the late 1970's with the Navy contracting with a private energy company to construct a geothermal plant near the Hot Springs. In January of 1978, Coso Hot Springs was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic and cultural property.

Tribal members and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) were concerned that geothermal production in and around the Coso Hot Springs could have an adverse effect on the Coso Hot Springs and indeed it has. Over the years the temperature of the hot springs water and mud have grown so intensely hot that tribal members cannot bathe there. Our tribal people have long requested that the Navy address the conditions of the springs without success. The Navy did conduct a study over ten years ago using its own geothermal staff and reported that there was no connection between the conditions at the springs and the geothermal development occurring next to the springs. Without tribal resources we have been helpless to conduct our own independent, unbiased evaluation of the Hot Springs and determine the true cause of their destruction and desecration.

Our need to protect Coso Hot Springs continues as the Navy currently is conducting deep test well drilling to the north of the springs to determine whether geothermal production and development should be expanded. My Tribe, as well as every Tribe in the Owens Valley, objected to the test well project. The Navy received our comments, as mandated but federal law, but did nothing with them. The test well project has gone forward and we are now left with waiting for the next step from the Navy, which we believe will be to expand development and production near the springs.

Tribal members have seen heightened security at Coso Hot Springs in light of the events of September 11, and are routinely told of the Navy's need for greater energy development, but my people can not allow our Coso Hot Springs to be a sacrificed for these objectives. Every federal agency must aggressively protect Native American sacred sights and share that responsibility with native people. Far to often, federal projects will threaten a sacred sight and we are asked to comment as part of the federal agency's "consultation" process. Our comments are submitted and seldom responded to. The federal agency responsible for the project proceeds thinking that it has complied with its consultation requirements, when in fact they never really heard what the Tribe had to say or adequately addressed the Tribe's concerns. All federal agencies and departments need to take a renewed look at their consultation process with Tribes and truly listen to what Native people are trying to tell them. The Native American Sacred Lands bill will hopefully refocus the federal government and bring greater protection for sacred land thus ensuring the opportunity to continue traditional activities.

Thank you, for the opportunity to present this testimony.