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Nuke Plant Foes Converging on Tiny Utah Town

By [David Hasemyer, InsideClimate News](#) [1]

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"In the long run we are not likely to come to an understanding," said an official of Blue Castle Holdings, the company aiming to build the nuclear plant.

By David Hasemyer, InsideClimate News

When Alfredo Figueroa stands on the banks of the Colorado River he is reverent out of respect for his tribal heritage yet troubled for future of this overused waterway, which is not only the lifeblood of the Chemehuevi people but also the primary drinking water source for tens of millions of people in the Southwest.

For centuries the [Chemehuevi tribe](#) [3] has depended on the river for drinking water, fishing and crop irrigation, as well as for the spiritual connection it provides between heaven and earth. And for years the tribe, whose members are descended from the ancient Aztecs, has fought anything that could harm the river.

Now the tribe is bracing to fight a nuclear power plant being planned for rural Southeastern Utah on the banks of the Green River, the Colorado's largest tributary. This weekend Figueroa and others from the tribe plan to travel 450 miles from their riverside home near Blyth, CA to Green River, Utah, a tiny town of 973, to protest the construction of twin nuclear reactors.

"We have to protect our river," Figueroa said.

The protestors say they've got a big point to make in this little town.

"This isn't the place for a nuclear power plant," said Laurel Hagen, a spokeswoman for the [No Green River Nuke Coalition](#) [4], one of the groups coordinating the event. The coalition and more than a dozen other organizations say that project proposed by Provo, Utah-based [Blue Castle Holdings](#) [5] threatens the fragile Green River.

They also are motivated by a number of other concerns, including what they say are Blue

Castle's shaky finances and troubled track record, the secondary impacts of mining and milling the radioactive uranium that will help power the plant, and the reactor's potential threat to regional safety.

The 6 p.m. Saturday demonstration, which the groups are calling "Celebrate and Protect the Green and Colorado Rivers and the Colorado Plateau," is designed to get the attention of people who may not be aware of the consequences of the reactors and to dissuade potential investors in the facility, Hagen said.

Reed Searle, Blue Castle's vice president of business development, said the company encourages discussions about the project and has held a series of public meetings in Green River and surrounding communities to address any concerns.

"These days nothing happens without people expressing their opinion on both sides," Searle said. "We welcome a healthy exchange of information."

He said company officials will be happy to address any specific issues raised at Saturday's demonstration. But he acknowledges, "in the long run we are not likely to come to an understanding."

Searle doesn't think the demonstration will influence potential partners, most of whom are expected to come from the utility industry. Blue Castle, he said, is taking all the risks and assuming the multi-million dollar costs for licensing of the facility.

"We believe if we demonstrate—and we will demonstrate—that this makes imminent financial success to them (the utilities), they will invest," he said.

Blue Castle has been laying the groundwork for the proposed \$16 billion plant since 2007. The company already has the go ahead from Utah regulators, primarily on the basis of securing water rights to the Green River that allow it to drain water from the river to cool the reactors and make steam to power the electricity generating turbines. The company is now seeking permits from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission ^[6] to build the 3,000-megawatt reactors.

Water is critical to the project's success and has become the galvanizing issue because it is such a precious and guarded commodity in the arid West. The plant would consume about 53,000 acre-feet of water annually—enough water to supply 200,000 people for a year.

Withdrawing that amount of water may not seem like a big deal, but the Green River and its Big Brother, the Colorado, are taxed almost to limit.

"It's foolish to build thirsty nuclear reactors in a desert like this," said John Weisheit, conservation director of Moab-based Living Rivers ^[7]. "The Green River is unreliable and over-appropriated."

Even the Utah State Engineer who approved the facility cautioned that the nearly 48 million gallons of water a day needed to operate the facility might not always be available.

Blue Castle officials insist there is plenty of water, saying the facility will draw less than one percent of the state's current water diversion.

"We're not taking water away from anyone," Blue Castle's chief executive officer, Aaron Tilton, told InsideClimate News in a recent interview [8].

A coalition of groups, small businesses and individuals opposed to the reactor proposal has filed a lawsuit in Utah District Court to have the decision to grant the project water rights overturned, an act that would probably end the project.

But Saturday is all about creating a public stir, Hagen said.

"We need to get more public scrutiny of this project," she said. "And we do that by making sure people know what's being planned; making them understand the risks."

Links:

[1] <http://insideclimatenews.org/author/david-hasemyer>

[2] <http://insideclimatenews.org/sites/default/files/greenriver.jpg>

[3] <http://www.chemehuevi.net/home.php>

[4] <http://www.nogreenrivernuke.org/>

[5] <http://www.bluecastleproject.com/>

[6] <http://www.nrc.gov/>

[7] <http://livingrivers.org/>

[8] <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20120417/nuclear-power-plant-utah-blue-castle-green-river-colorado-river-water-war-sec-climate-change-drought>

[9] <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20110302/us-nuclear-power-energy-radioactive-waste-storage-yucca-mountain>

[10] <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20110615/nuclear-retreat-Japan-Fukushima-co2-emissions-climate>

[11] <http://insideclimatenews.org/reuters-topics/green-energy>

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