SIX

In Defense of Mother Earth

The Indigenous Environmental Network

The Indigenous Environmental Network, an international coalition of more than forty grassroots Indian environmental justice groups based in Bemidji, Minnesota, began in a humble spot: Lori Goodman's kitchen table in Dilkon, a small, isolated Navajo town of 285 people in northeast Arizona. It was around that table that Goodman and other activists first strategized on how to beat a toxic waste incinerator proposed for their community—a struggle that would lead them to initiate the broad-based effort focused on Native American environmental issues that evolved into the network.

It sounded like a great idea to Tribal officials on the Navajo reservation: a $40 million recycling plant that would bring 200 desperately needed jobs to the isolated Navajo community of Dilkon, Arizona, where unemployment hovered around 75 percent. Waste-Tech Services promised the community of Dilkon $200,000 a year, with an additional $600,000 a year to be paid to the Navajo Nation in rent and lease funds. Company officials pledged that 95 percent of the jobs would go to Navajo workers and that they would set up a scholarship fund for Navajo students interested in coming back to work as chemists or technicians at the plant.[1] On the basis of these representations by the company, the Tribal chair (similar to a state governor of the reservation) approved the plant in August 1988, and Waste-Tech began plans to set up shop in the remote town.

Then local residents heard about the proposal. When an article appeared in a local newspaper, in December 1988, Dilkon residents began to organize and to find out about the proposal.[2] They formed Citizens

Against Ruining our Environment (CARE) and began meeting regularly to figure out what the proposed project was all about.

The "great idea" began to fade as the community discovered more details of the proposed facility. The "recycling facility" turned out to be a toxic waste incinerator, designed to burn chemicals and industrial solvents from oil fields, lumber yards, and hospitals.[3] The toxic waste would be trucked in from California, Nevada, Colorado, and even Puerto Rico.[4] Tons of incinerator ash would be left over from the process.

Waste-Tech had assured the community that the ash would be safe.[5] But CARE's investigations, and information supplied by Greenpeace, revealed that ash left over from toxic waste incineration is itself toxic. Each previously undisclosed fact revealed by CARE reduced the project's credibility in Dilkon.

Early in 1989, the incinerator proposal ran into even bigger problems. Public outrage against the incinerator was building throughout the Navajo reservation. News articles revealed that Waste-Tech's parent company, Blaze Construction, had hired Navajo Nation Tribal Chair Peter MacDonald's son—for $6,000 a month—to help the company get the necessary permits from the Navajo Nation,[6] in what looked to CARE and others like an attempt to buy approval of the project over local opposition.

Community outrage rose to a crescendo when residents discovered that the incinerator would also burn medical waste, including human body parts and amputated limbs. "That's what really turned the stomachs of the Elders," explained CARE cofounder Abe Plummer. "We have a belief that you respect the dead, and if you have to cut off a part of the body you put it in the Earth with respect—with prayers, not just throw it in the trash."[7]

CARE both created and stoked this outrage. The small group meeting around the kitchen table quickly grew into an eighty-member organization that prepared residents to testify at the upcoming public hearings on the project. CARE moved its planning meetings to the local school.

In an effort to build public support for their now controversial proposal, Waste-Tech Services, Inc., and High-Tech Recycling, Inc., brought a panel of engineering experts to a public hearing held by the Tribe in Dilkon on February 25, 1989, to discuss the project. At the end

of the hearing, a vote was taken of those residents present: ninety-nine opposed the project, while six supported it.[8] Tribal decision makers saw the writing on the wall, and at the next council meeting, on March 6, they unanimously rescinded the earlier approval and requested further that "the toxic waste site not be located anywhere within the Navajo reservation."[9]

Waste-Tech pulled out of the project. The facility's other major backer, High-Tech Recycling, tried again the following month with a proposal for a "treatment, storage, and disposal facility"—a fancy name for a toxic waste dump. The Dilkon community was not impressed. Things came to a head on April 11, at a community meeting at which company officials presented the dump proposal. CARE had invited a Greenpeace staffer, Bradley Angel, to the meeting, and Angel made a presentation on the dangers of toxic dumps and pointed out how other Tribes throughout the West were being similarly targeted for unwanted waste facilities. Tribal Elders asked the company, "If it is so safe, if it is such a good idea, if it makes so much money, why aren't the white people grabbing at it in L.A. and San Francisco?"[10] By the end of the meeting, the company's representative announced that he was forced to abandon the dump proposal at Dilkon.[11] CARE's victories over the incinerator and the dump projects, with their beginnings at Lori Goodman's kitchen table, would come to have national implications.

Beyond Dilkon

Native Americans have a tie to the land that is different from that of other U.S. residents, and this tie informs the grassroots environmental activism in Indian communities. Spiritually and legally, Indians have a unique relationship with the land: spiritually, many Indians worship their ancestral lands, which figure in different Tribes' creation stories. The birds and animals that inhabit the land are sacred, messengers for the spirits or even spirits themselves. "The spirit of the broader indigenous movement," explains Jackie Warledo, a founder of the Indigenous Environmental Network and for many years the Native Lands Campaigner for Greenpeace, "is that integral understanding that you're a part of everything—you're not set apart, you're a part *of*."[12] For tens of thousands of years, Indian nations have had a relationship with their sur-

roundings, and in today's Environmental Justice Movement activists are defending that relationship by defending Mother Earth. The degradation of natural resources has a distinct impact on Native peoples.

> These issues are very hard to deal with. It's even hard for some of our communities to deal with things that are causing death in our communities. It's really hard to talk about PCB contamination along the St. Lawrence River corridor in New York when you know that your sisters are there, that their breastmilk is contaminated with PCB. It's hard to deal with when you're talking with people that still maintain a fishing culture living along the Columbia River, who show us photographs of contaminated fish tissue, fish you see were mutated. They know that there already has been radioactive impacts to the fish. And they know that as long as they continue to eat the fish that the health of their people is going to be impacted. But they also know too that it's not as simple as issuing a fish advisory notification; it's not as simple as telling a mother not to breastfeed. Because the original instructions are not man made. These are original instructions that are part of our spiritual being. We have a relationship, deeper than a brother-sister relationship, with these creations, with the fish nation. These people along the Columbia are the river people, they've been living there for thousands of years. That fish is their brother. And the fish says, "Take of me, take of me, eat of me, I'm here for you and you are here for me. I need you. We need each other." So if you stop eating the fish, that affects the whole balance of things. A lot of the people we've been talking with and we meet are part of subsistence cultures, land-based cultures, that still live off the land, even though we've done what we can to notify them on what the impacts are, they make their decision to continue to eat those things in the food web. Even knowing that the food web is contaminated.
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> —Tom Goldtooth[13]

Legally, Native Americans have a different relationship with the land as well. They are the only group of U.S. citizens who have prescribed areas to live on, in the form of reservations, pueblos, and rancherias. Because of their historical, spiritual, and legal ties to the land, Native Americans do not have the same mobility that others facing environmental hazards might have. "Because we're still here in our original lands, we still have the memory of particular spots, we still have the connection and the relationship to particular places on this land," says Warledo.

In the late 1980s, many Native communities were approached by outside companies with proposals for toxic waste dumps, incinerators, and other industrial facilities. The companies were seeking jurisdictions with less regulation, and less environmental oversight and enforcement, than were imposed by state governments. The companies sought to capitalize on the confusion over environmental regulatory authority on Indian lands: state law does not apply to Indian lands if it is preempted by federal law or if its imposition would interfere with a Tribe's ability to regulate and govern its own affairs, so Native lands are not subject to the more stringent environmental requirements imposed under state law. Federal environmental laws do apply to Indian lands (with the prominent exception of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, which covers the disposal of hazardous waste), but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has almost no enforcement presence on reservations. The Tribes involved, many of which did not have environmental protection departments or Tribal environmental laws, often looked at the proposals as economic development opportunities. It was only when Tribal residents began to investigate the proposals that their true nature became evident. "In the late '80s, people began to ask questions and want to know more about these facilities and these activities," explains Jackie Warledo. "In the early '90s, as people began to communicate with each other and reach out to larger environmental organizations for information on these kinds of facilities, for community people, there was caution and concern, and, in some cases, there was community opposition to these facilities being sited."

It was in this context that CARE beat the Dilkon incinerator and established a link to other, similarly-situated Native communities with their own environmental struggles. When other Native groups began to hear about CARE's success, CARE received phone calls from around the country requesting help in other environmental struggles on Indian reservations. One of CARE's outside supporters, Bradley Angel of Greenpeace, had been working with several other grassroots Indian groups and was also flooded with calls. At the victory celebration in Dilkon, CARE leader Abe Plummer suggested that CARE host a conference of Indian people who were fighting waste facilities, to network and share information. Plummer turned to Angel, who was attending the celebration, and said, "And Greenpeace will pay for the conference,

right?" Angel lobbied his Washington, D.C.–based superiors, explaining the burgeoning number of proposals for toxic facilities on Indian lands, and when CARE decided to convene a gathering, Greenpeace, together with Chris Peters of the Seventh Generation Fund, provided financial backing. More than 200 people from twenty-five different Tribes attended the gathering that resulted, which convened in Dilkon in June 1990 and which was billed the "Protecting Mother Earth Conference."

At the Dilkon gathering, a moment of realization took place in some participants' minds. CARE members were aware of the United Church of Christ's *Toxic Wastes and Race* report, and they connected the national pattern of unequal distribution of toxic waste facilities to the targeting of their community for the toxic waste incinerator.[14] Nevertheless, they and others were surprised to see the same issues—outside interests seeking to place undesirable land uses on Indian reservations—arise in a variety of guises, from nuclear waste storage facilities to toxic waste landfills to garbage dumps. "These companies seem to feel that it's just Indian land—and who cares about one more dead Indian? It's the same mentality from way back," said Abe Plummer of CARE.[15]

Nor could tribal members depend on their elected leaders. "Corporations seemed to be lining the pocketbooks of a lot of tribal leaders, especially if it involved natural resources and environment," explains Tom Goldtooth, coordinator of IEN. "What was emerging was a grassroots movement, of grassroots people, speaking out from the grassroots level."

At the Dilkon gathering leaders also realized that grassroots tribal groups needed to remain in contact. "People began to realize that there was a lot of communication and networking that was needed," says Warledo, who helped organize the first meeting. "People felt that we needed some kind of a mechanism or an entity that would connect the communities," she notes, adding that grassroots tribal groups wanted "places that you could get information on, 'what is an incinerator?' 'what is a landfill?' 'what are the regulations on them?'" People at the first gathering had a host of unanswered questions.

No concrete organization grew out of the Dilkon gathering. Instead, there was a strong sense that people should communicate among themselves. Several of the core activists who had met and networked at the Dilkon conference kept in contact and soon decided that a second conference should be planned for the following summer.

The second gathering was held near Bear Butte, South Dakota, the following June. At Bear Butte, those who gathered physically demonstrated their solidarity with two local Lakota groups, the Good Road Coalition and the Native Resource Coalition, which were fighting massive garbage dumps proposed for the nearby Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. At Bear Butte, the debate around the formation of a national network also came to a head. "People wanted coverage," says Warledo, but "people didn't want another national organization."

A Network of Indigenous People Working on Environmental Issues: IEN Is Born

The loose group of people exchanging phone calls became more solidified after Bear Butte. "Early on, we asked ourselves, 'what is this?'" remembers Jackie Warledo. "It was a network, and it was focused on environmental issues, and it was an entity that would do this work by and for indigenous people—it was an indigenous environmental network." Thus, the Indigenous Environmental Network was born.

The ten or twelve Native American activists who formed the loose group and who ultimately founded IEN didn't want just another national organization; they wanted a real network, a body that would share information among its members. During the year after Bear Butte, several organizational meetings were held to develop by-laws and an organizational structure. "It was a little slow," says Goldtooth, "because people said 'yes, these are by-laws, but we want to have our own language, where we will be able put together something that we can say reflects traditional values. And there was no other model at the time—most of the things that were developed were based upon white folks' hierarchy systems: board of directors, structures, and this is something that the constituents of IEN did not want." These meetings did not take place in a vacuum: the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit took place in October 1991, and many of the early organizers of IEN took part in the summit. Other networks, particularly the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, were also organizing at the time. But IEN was different: it was not a geographically-based network but was made up of grassroots Indian groups around the United States. It was an activist group, but, unlike the other environ-

mental justice networks that were developing at the time, it had a strong spiritual component to its work and identity. Goldtooth calls IEN "a form of de-programming."

> The Indigenous Environmental Network came out of the fire, our sacred fire. Everyone I've talked to who were the founders, and those other people who have come to the gatherings, believe that there is a spiritual foundation to our Network, that we were brought together from many different tribes and cultures and languages but that we have something in common that brought us together, and that's faith, a spiritualness in our cultures and our spiritual belief that no matter what we do, we have to continue to pray and respect the Mother Earth.
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> —Tom Goldtooth

At the third annual gathering, at Celilo, Oregon, IEN created the National Task Force, which soon evolved into IEN's governing body, the national council. The national council is made up of grassroots Indian groups, such as CARE and the Columbia River Economic and Education Alliance, as well as several national groups such as the International Indian Treaty Council and the Indigenous Women's Network. The groups have institutional seats on the national council, a structure designed so that individuals who serve are selected by and accountable to their organizations. There are also three "regional" seats on the national council, one each from Oklahoma, Alaska, and the Great Lakes; these representatives are chosen by grassroots groups in their region. Because many of the struggles in Indian county are between Tribal governments and grassroots Indian groups, Tribal nations are not represented on the national council. "We are all members of our own nations and IEN has working relationships now with many tribal Nations, of course," says Warledo, "but IEN is for the grassroots."

The national council's decision making is by consensus, a style drawn from Native American traditions. Such a decision-making style—in which everyone must agree on a particular course of action before it is undertaken—is not always easy, admit IEN leaders. "The thing that keeps us working at it, at getting us through the complications, is the commitment to the common spiritual foundation," explains Warledo. "Not any one person or one Tribe's spiritual ways, but a common foundation that is reflected in our guiding documents."

Walking the Walk: IEN in Action

In the early years, IEN carried out its work through the national council; this sharing of responsibility was not only a political statement but a practical necessity: IEN had no employees. The national council organized the annual "Protecting Mother Earth" gathering and fielded questions from grassroots Indian groups around the country. "Every year that we've had a gathering, we get more phone calls," explains Goldtooth, "and it started to create a bottleneck because we didn't have any staff."

Fundraising by council members paid off in 1995: after working as IEN's volunteer coordinator, Tom Goldtooth was hired as IEN's first staff person. Goldtooth, who had come of age in an era of Indian activism and had been involved with IEN since 1991, was at the time the environmental director of the Red Lakes Band of Chippewa. Through his work he had come to the realization that the chronic underfunding of Indian environmental programs by the federal government occurred not by accident but by design. "I started to look at this as another colonial action of the government," he explains. "I've always had this feeling that the government is in cahoots with corporations, and that it's the corporations that want to take advantage of our resources. Surely, corporations don't want tribes to have strong environmental protection infrastructures; they don't want tribes to be exercising full sovereignty to implement their own enforcement laws, because if the tribes did do that, it may limit or fully restrict the ability of these corporations to continue to tap the tender resources, the water resources, the mineral resources."

Goldtooth's hiring gave IEN new capacity to serve grassroots groups. He brought both technical expertise as a Tribal environmental manager and strategic expertise from his years of experience as an activist. He has expanded the work of IEN significantly, and today IEN's work takes place on a variety of levels: the group provides education and training, technical assistance, strategic advice, and networking. A primary focus of IEN, and one of its key strategies, has remained the annual gathering.

Gatherings as Political Strategy and Spiritual Sustenance

IEN's yearly Protecting Mother Earth conferences are central to its mission, helping to bring together Native American activists and their allies

to network and strategize, rededicate themselves to the struggle, celebrate victories, educate one another and learn from homegrown experts, support local struggles, and see old friends. There are dozens of panel workshops with Native leaders and outside technical experts that provide both substantive information and strategic advice. Many activists find that other attendees from other communities are fighting similar struggles, and informal caucusing is a common event.

A typical day at the 1999 conference, for example, began with a sunrise prayer ceremony, followed by a morning plenary session on "Uranium and Indigenous People," which featured speakers from Native American pueblos in New Mexico as well as an Indian activist from Canada and an aboriginal mining activist from Australia. At lunch, advocacy groups such as Health Care without Harm gave brief presentations on their work. After lunch, there were a variety of concurrent workshops with titles like "Uranium Mining/Milling Radiation Victims Compensation Payment," "Introduction to Federal and Indigenous Environmental Laws," "Biological Diversity and the Impact of Globalism," "Nuclear Colonialism," and "Landfills, Incineration, and Municipal Solid Waste." Some of the workshops were technical in nature—subjects included how to file radiation illness claims and what the technical flaws are in landfills—while others were aimed at describing different struggles or policies. There were also training sessions (e.g., "Basic Media Skills and Tactics" and "Air Testing"), as well as training in traditional Indian ways such as adobe building and the use of medicinal herbs and plants. In the evening, those gathered took part in cultural performances such as dances and drumming displays.

Each conference creates hundreds of new experts on local issues, who take their newly learned knowledge back to their communities and struggles. "We have our gatherings at different places throughout the country, so we have different faces," explains Goldtooth. In this way, IEN builds both the capacity and the consciousness of conference attendees.

The location of each Protecting Mother Earth conference serves to highlight local struggles, bringing together activists at environmental justice flashpoints around the country. "The role of the conference is to express physical solidarity with the host community. When you have five hundred people there, then it's a major morale boost to whoever's living

there," says Goldtooth. "And it spreads the word about that particular struggle back to these hundred of places where all the participants have come from." The Third Annual Gathering, in 1992 at Celilo, Oregon, on the banks of the Columbia River, drew attention to the Hanford federal nuclear site and its impact on Columbia River tribes. Native anti-nuclear activists who met at the conference later formed a smaller network to work solely on nuclear issues.

The June 1993 conference, held at the Sac and Fox Nation in central Oklahoma, celebrated that Nation's recent rejection of a proposal to build a high-level radioactive waste disposal facility on the reservation, as well as called attention to the impacts of energy resource development on Oklahoma tribes. Exxon's proposed Crandon zinc and copper sulfide mine near five Wisconsin Indian reservations was the target of the June 1994 conference, hosted by the Mole Lake Sokaogon Chippewa community. The mine threatened to contaminate surface waters—and thus wild rice beds—in Central Wisconsin. The June 1995 conference, near Chickaloon Village, Alaska, focused attention on the legion of environmental problems faced by Alaska Native nations, including cleanup of oil production contamination, forestry, nuclear waste, and the repeated attempts to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—home of the porcupine caribou, sacred to the Gwiichin people—for oil drilling. In 1996, the Eastern Cherokee Defense League hosted the conference in Cherokee, North Carolina, raising consciousness about dioxin from a local paper mill, acid rain and deforestation issues, and the impact of tourism on the Cherokee. The massive cyanide heap leach gold mine above the Fort Belknap reservation was the focal point of 1997's conference, hosted by the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of Montana. And sacred sites threatened by geothermal energy development and a ski resort were the issues highlighted by the 1998 gathering, held in Northern California on the Pitt River Tribe's ancestral lands.

There is also a deep spiritual component to each conference: the conference begins with the lighting of the sacred fire, which is kept burning throughout the gathering. Sunrise prayer ceremonies kick off most mornings, and many participate in sweat lodges in the evenings after the day's proceedings. Dances and drumming are the highlight of each evening, as the different Tribes represented share their cultural traditions with the group.

> To be a so-called "environmentalist" you're talking about spiritual things. So that's why at our gatherings it's just natural that we have a sacred fire. We light a sacred fire at every one of our gatherings for four days. We start out at sunrise, and we burn that fire continuously, it has never gone out during those four days in eight years. We let it die out at the conclusion of the summit. . . . We feel from the deepest of our hearts in our Network that this fire guides us throughout the whole year. It guides all the people that come to the gathering and those that haven't come to the gatherings that are dealing with these very serious issues involving the sacredness of the earth and the sacredness of creation. And what that fire symbolizes is understanding and protection, and it represents the light that we all seek in our own life from the great spirit, from some higher power, however people perceive that.
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> —Tom Goldtooth

The conferences can be empowering for those who attend. "As people take on and learn and link up with others, they're empowered, they're encouraged—they can be creative; they can think of several options to anything that they must cover and have other people that they can turn to for strategy," says Warledo. "It gives them that experience—they become experts and they can take on their struggle or issue so that as their lands and their health are faced with another assault, they are not looking for someone else to come in and do anything for them."

IEN in Action

IEN's work goes far beyond its annual gatherings. It extends to sharing information, providing training and technical assistance, developing policy, and offering strategic advice.

For IEN, information is power. "If you look at our community members that live way out in the bush, that live way out in the prairie, the desert, and plateaus—that are working on issues from mining issues to water diversion, water rights, to air pollution to timber, a number of different issues—they don't have information at the community level," says Goldtooth. "A lot of them don't have phones, and for a lot of them, the roads are impassable at times of weather." To get its constituents the information they need, IEN acts like the hub of a wheel, providing a

common place through which individuals and communities can communicate. In a clearinghouse fashion, it shares information gathered from one community with other communities that are facing similar struggles. Going beyond being simply a library of resources, however, is the key to IEN's networking: "When there's something impacting a community, it may be an issue where we know another community doing the same thing, and we will facilitate the communication between those two groups," explains Jackie Warledo. "IEN will try to put communities in touch with the source for themselves, and if they want us to help them walk through that or guide them, we will, but they don't have to come through us—they can take those next steps themselves."

> The network started at a time when toxic waste dumping was a big issue, and I think we've been effective since then on educating our communities that toxic dumping on Indian land is not an option for discussion, that it was not respectful of our spiritual beliefs as Native people. We learned that the technology behind landfilling and incineration was still a beginning technology; we learned that there is no engineer that would sign the dotted line that the liner would not leak; we learned that there's still a lot of air pollution with incineration and that you still have the landfill with incinerators. We started learning all these things through the network, just basically talking to people from the grassroots level, with common language. I guess that's one of the things that came out of our network, was deciphering all of this technology and these terms into language that our people understand.
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> —Tom Goldtooth

IEN encourages grassroots Indian groups to work with their own tribes to resolve environmental problems. "In a lot of the cases, their own tribal leaders who make the decisions are not provided adequate information," says Goldtooth. "If they are provided information, it usually comes from the company that wants to come in. We find that usually the leaders have been open to information and that we've been able to turn some decisions around." In cases where local tribal authorities are unresponsive, IEN helps groups take their struggle to a different forum.

IEN's recent work with the Yankton Sioux illustrates its complementary approaches of offering organizing help, technical assistance, and ed-

ucation. When the local county in which the Yankton Sioux Reservation is located formed a solid waste compact with four surrounding counties to develop a garbage dump at the reservation boundary, activists contacted IEN. IEN provided tribal leaders and its environmental director with information on the hazards of landfills; this included technical studies of the reasons landfills fail. Tom Goldtooth worked with local activists to organize resistance to the landfill, publicizing some of the conclusions of the technical studies as well as sharing experiences from other reservations that had faced similar projects. Goldtooth also met with the Tribal Council to explain the landfill proposal and to support the Tribal members' opposition to it. The strategy that emerged from these meetings called for the Tribe to set up its own Tribal solid waste management program, building the capacity of the Tribe to handle its own environmental affairs.

In a similar manner, IEN worked with activist members of the Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians to determine effective responses to illegal dumping on the reservation. Part of IEN's work was concrete: it helped bring in a soil scientist, who was able to perform soil and water testing to determine what contaminants were present at the illegal dumpsite. Perhaps a more important part of its work was developing the capacity of tribal leaders to direct the outside expert's work; IEN helped these leaders develop the questions to be asked and to understand the answers to them. Tribal activists used the same approach for dealing with the legal resources provided by IEN, going over legal questions and strategies before bringing in the lawyer.

IEN also arranged for a fly-over of the reservation by environmental activists and tribal members to take aerial photographs of the dumping. "That was the first time that the community members have ever seen the bird's-eye view of what they were dealing with," says Goldtooth, noting that Tribal members then used the photographs as an organizing tool on the reservation. "Now they've got some evidence, reports, and they've got aerial photographs, and now they're able to respond on a local level."

At Fort Belknap, Montana, Tribal officials of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes contacted IEN for assistance in challenging the expansion of the Pegasus cyanide heap leach gold mine directly adjacent to the reservation. IEN was able to put tribal officials in touch with a pro

bono geologist, a retired EPA employee, who was able to point out a number of flaws in the Environmental Impact Statement for the Pegasus mine expansion. This advice also influenced the Tribes' posture in approving a consent decree EPA had negotiated with Pegasus.

IEN as a Policy Voice for the Grassroots

IEN now serves as a national voice on environmental justice for scattered grassroots tribal groups. In this role, IEN brings to the attention of decision makers the issues that affect indigenous people in their communities and leverages its access to those decision makers to bring resolution to local problems.

Tom Goldtooth, national coordinator of IEN, sits on the U.S. EPA's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, the body appointed to give input to the agency on environmental justice matters, and chairs the NEJAC's Indigenous Subcommittee. Through that forum, IEN has consistently been able to present crucial local issues to decision makers in Washington, D.C.; the bundling of local issues also helps demonstrate the national policy implications of EPA's actions in any particular situation.

At a recent NEJAC meeting, for example, Goldtooth was able to present testimony on behalf of the Fort Mojave Tribe of California, the Klickitat Band of Washington State, the Walpole Island First Nation of Ontario, Canada, and the Mattaponi of Virginia. By educating NEJAC members about local issues, Goldtooth has been able to build coalitions of NEJAC members; as a result, the council has consistently passed resolutions requesting that the EPA pay attention to Tribal struggles.

Partnerships with Outside Resources

IEN's creation led the national environmental group Greenpeace USA to rethink its policies and focus more on Native American issues.[16] Greenpeace staff, after being contacted by Native American activists from a number of reservations throughout the West, convinced the organization's leaders that Indian lands were becoming a toxic dumping ground and should be the focus of increased attention. To meet the challenge from Native American activists and its own staff, Greenpeace,

which offered significant financial help to the first three IEN conferences, hired a full-time organizer on Indian issues, Jackie Warledo, a respected activist from Oklahoma. "Greenpeace accepted the challenge," says Warledo, noting that Greenpeace ultimately hired several Indian activists and named a national Indian leader, Winona LaDuke, to its five-member Board of Directors. "Greenpeace made a public commitment to support the work of Native people in protecting the environment." This commitment was crucial for getting the organization off the ground, but IEN was quick to stand on its own. "Greenpeace gave momentum and resources to the leadership that we had within IEN," says Goldtooth, noting that Greenpeace staffers "solved a need for IEN and supported the creation of IEN, but soon IEN developed its own strength, [and] its own financial capacity." IEN worked in partnership with Greenpeace for many years, until the late 1990s, when budget woes at Greenpeace led the organization to rethink its policy priorities and close its Native lands campaign.

IEN has also developed partnerships with other traditional environmental groups; it and Clean Water Action have a mercury project that focuses on the Great Lakes, and it has teamed up with the Institute for Agricultural Policy and International Issues on biological diversity issues. "As we further developed IEN, we found that there is some validity to developing partnerships between us and nonnative groups," says Goldtooth, to develop capacity and knowledge on a particular issue with the idea of ultimately developing a native organization around that issue. Goldtooth chooses the description "partnership" carefully to emphasize a coming together of two equal players to solve a common task, rather than a dependent relationship.

Conclusion

Warledo notes that IEN is still a work-in-progress. "This is uncharted territory—trying to do a network, working on consensus, covering a large territory geographically, being inter-Tribal, with various issues," she points out. But she, Goldtooth, and other IEN veterans see the international network as key for moving the struggle for environmental justice forward. IEN's goal, says Warledo, is "not to always have one unit or one entity that is always the central one, but have IEN as more

a catalyst and a common place for communication that is constantly moving, that isn't stagnant. I think that it is working because people are empowering their own selves—they are becoming their own resources to network out to other groups, and they're becoming experts in various things."