

Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action

88 minutes

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[00:00:01.00] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:01:12.40] [BIRD CRY]

[00:01:19.60] I've always known that this is the place I was meant to be. This is my source of strength here. This land that I live on today with my four kids, it's my mother's family's land, and her family, they're buried right behind us here in the hills.

[00:01:48.19] The Cheyenne themselves are about 8,000 tribal members. We live on about 500,000 acres of land here in southeastern Montana. That land is tied to the culture, to the language, to the viewpoint. So there's a tremendous spiritual connection to our homeland that is the core of the fight here.

[00:02:27.27] [WHINNY]

[00:02:43.17] All my life, my people have been fighting to keep strip mining off our reservation. Right now, our tribal lands are surrounded by Montana's largest power plant, five massive strip mines, and the largest coal-fired generating complex in the country. When the Bush administration came into office in 2000, Vice President Dick Cheney held a series of closed door meetings to shape this nation's energy policy. This country will never know exactly what went on in those meetings with energy lobbyists, but what happened to us was this-- the Tongue River Valley where we live was opened up to massive development.

[00:03:29.26] From the Gulf of Mexico to the far reaches of Alaska, the Bush administration plans to step up drilling for oil and natural gas even in some of America's most untouched spots.

[00:03:43.46] They're basically coming in and sizing up what's left in the United States, and it's like whatever they can take, they're trying to take. They're streamlining, gutting whatever laws are out there. It's like the gold rush days. It's like there's a rush to get Indian energy resources.

[00:04:05.05] So today, Indian country, these last slivers of land are the places where there is still oil, where there is still natural gas, where there is still coal methane, where there is still pockets of uranium, where there are still forests, where there is still water. That is the frontier that is left because it has not yet been exploited.

[00:04:27.16] What they want right now is not so much coal, it's natural gas. Really, it's methane. It's coalbed methane gas in our area of the Powder River Basin, but natural gas makes it sound like it's so nice.

[00:04:47.00] Coalbed methane gas is the primary constituent of natural gas that you burn in your homes or in your business. They drill down into the coal seam, which is where both the coalbed methane water and coalbed methane gas resides, and then another smaller pipe with an electric pump on it pumps a combination of gas and water to the surface.

[00:05:20.51] The production, particularly in the Powder River Basin, is associated with lots and lots of saline water. Those wells will produce something like six billion barrels of water. The easiest and cheapest thing to do with that produced water is to dump it, and the impacts associated with discharging huge volumes of produced coalbed methane water are just staggering.

[00:05:49.55] The primary component of your household cleaners is sodium, and the reason why it works is because it causes the soil particles to essentially come apart. And so water that's high in sodium causes that same thing to happen. It causes the soil particles to come apart. Once that happens, the soil can no longer take water in, and you lose the ability to use it for agricultural production.

[00:06:15.55] The technology exists today to reinject the salty water back into the methane wells, but it would cost the companies money.

[00:06:23.45] The money is there to do this thing right, and it needs to be done right so that everyone else is not damaged for the benefit of the producers.

[00:06:35.16] It's outrageous that these energy companies would be allowed to dump the wastewater, the salty water, and they're dumping it as we speak. The plan now is to surround our reservation with 75,000 methane gas wells. These wells will drain our groundwater and turn our homeland into a desert.

[00:07:06.60] I think the water's alive. It's moving. With water here, we can live forever. And as long as the river flows, the grass grows, we always have a homeland. Once it's destroyed, we're going to-- I don't know what's going to become of us.

[00:07:35.12] This is our land. We were born and raised here, and we are part of this land, part of this earth.

[00:07:56.22] [MUSIC - ROBBIE ROBERTSON, "PEYOTE HEALING"]

[00:07:56.71] [SINGING IN LAKOTA]

[00:08:01.64] We would go with my grandmother to pick cherries and Buffalo berries, and when we approached the trees, my grandmother would say-- she would stand there and talk, actually talk to the trees, and say we're going to pick you. We're not here to abuse you. We are very closely connected with this earth, and we have to respect it and treat it like it's our very own mother.

[00:08:43.45] This isn't the first time that we've been up against the energy giants. The Cheyenne reservation, carved from land once considered too barren for farming or ranching ironically turns out to sit atop top one of the largest deposits of clean-burning coal in the world, deposits estimated to be worth over \$200 billion. I remember when I was starting high school, the big companies came in here wanting to get their hands on our coal. That's 30 years ago, the coal wars.

[00:09:23.09] During the energy crisis of the oil embargoes, the big thrust was to use Wyoming and Montana and those vast coal reserves to fuel the nation.

[00:09:43.37] America's energy demands now outstrip our energy--

[00:09:46.48] 200 million people, each burning three gallons of fuel every day.

[00:09:49.60] In Colorado, in August, gasoline stations closed down all across the state.

[00:09:53.05] What is needed now is decisive and responsible action to increase our energy supplies.

[00:10:04.71] The term that was used in Montana really was, you're looking to us to be a national sacrifice area. That is, we're going to have all of the impacts to light the cities, in Seattle and so forth.

[00:10:21.20] Who gets sacrificed? What gets sacrificed? You want to give up your yard? I don't want to give up mine. Why should I?

[00:10:34.96] At the time, we had a Tribal Council that had a very limited understanding of the English language, and they really didn't comprehend that the coal companies were going to come in and develop the coal. What was always told them is that they were going to come in and explore and find out how much energy resources we had. This was all pushed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The BIA came in, and they sent in their specialists in. And they told the tribe, this is a real good deal.

[00:11:01.73] The Northern Cheyenne Reservation spreads across 437,000 acres. Over half of that land is committed to exploration by the coal companies.

[00:11:11.55] The lure that was used in that first initial approach was money. Certainly, our people here are in need of money.

[00:11:22.07] It was economic blackmail. Our tribe was so poor, we didn't even have running water in our houses. Even today, the average income here is only around \$10,000.

[00:11:34.66] Every Indian reservation in this country-- the least electrified, the least spent on health, the least spent on education, the least spent on infrastructure, and so tribes are desperate to find some way to generate income for their communities.

[00:11:56.05] So the companies were going to come in, and we all had this little standoff with them where we wouldn't allow them to cross into our homeland. And so the Tribal Council decided that we're going to have to sue the companies to break the contract. Otherwise, there would probably be violence, and our young people here would get hurt.

[00:12:14.35] [TRAIN HORN]

[00:12:16.09] What began was a very long fight. It went through all during my high school years. The coal wars were very personal. All us Cheyenne kids were bused 25 miles off the reservation to Colstrip, to the same school as kids whose parents worked for the coal companies.

[00:12:40.27] And they would call us prairie niggers, that we were anti-everything, like we were anti-progress, our tribe. So I quit school when I was about-- I think I was a junior. I just couldn't endure the harassment that we were getting from non-Indians down there because of our tribe's stand against mining and protecting our land. So a lot of us quit high school.

[00:13:03.38] [CRICKETS]

[00:13:06.82] [DOG WHINING]

[00:13:13.71] So when a lot of us left for college, it was even harder. Very few of us got through. I think my class, there's only about three of us Indian students that got through. And then came home, and the coal wars were still getting hotter and more heated.

[00:13:32.30] At 21, I was the youngest member of the tribal negotiating committee working to get the coal leases canceled, and I was the only one with a college degree. It was a long, hard road. It took 15 years, but we finally won. In the 1980s, the courts ordered in our favor, and all the leases on our lands were cancelled.

[00:13:56.25] That gave us sustenance, internally, to keep going, that maybe there was some hope in the American court system. It also gave me hope that this was the best way I could help my people. I went to law school. I returned to the reservation in 1984 to form a nonprofit organization.

[00:14:24.60] OK, we're coming up to my office, which is Native Action. We just got that today. My dad was laughing. He said, the Pony Express was pretty heavy today. Well, we need more file cabinets, don't we, Dad? We're down to using orange boxes now.

[00:14:53.56] It's a very small, flexible organization, and reluctantly, we get involved in some litigation. But our main focus is to create the information for the people to be able to grasp and then for them to speak their own voice. The people here could all be millionaires if they would sign on the dotted line and go into a major energy contract. But they vote, and they've chosen to say no. For 30-some years, they've voted and said no.

[00:15:22.70] Now, that to me, is almost like a miracle. I mean, you look at any other people in the world-- in the world-- who have been given this abundance of wealth and for over 30-some years have said no. It's really a story that I find no analogy to.

[00:15:54.88] Our values come from our ancestors. They give us the strength to fight for this last small island of land that we live on today. In the summer of 1876, the Cheyenne joined with the Sioux and the Arapaho for one last stab at freedom in what we become known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

[00:16:17.75] [WAR CRIES]

[00:16:30.05] After the Custer battle, we were marched to Oklahoma as prisoners of war. Hundreds of our people died of disease and starvation. The Cheyenne decided they would rather die fighting.

[00:16:43.40] They told the military that they are returning to their beloved north country, and they asked if they could get a little ways north before they made the ground bloody. They were relentlessly pursued as they made the brutal trek back to the Powder River Basin, hundreds of miles on foot. Only 300 Cheyenne people survived, but finally, we were granted a small reservation here along the Tongue River.

[00:17:12.34] Almost makes you cry, what our people went through, endured for me to be living here today, for me to be raising my kids here. It's a very heroic, heroic tale of the strength and the courage of the Cheyenne people. It's very powerful to have that kind of history. And it's not something you just sign away on a piece of paper and say, well, make me a millionaire tomorrow, then, and I'll give up all this land and this history. It's not the Cheyenne way to do that.

[00:18:02.15] Oh, here's flour, Dad. I got flour here. My dad has a reputation for making the best gravy. Very grateful that my parents are both here, my mother and my dad, and support all of our work and give us kids a lot of direction. And youngest son, Joaquin here, grateful that he supports a lot of our work, too. So with that, I'd like to ask my mom to say a prayer.

[00:18:30.75] In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth--

[00:18:45.03] Recently, the Bureau of Land Management started approving coalbed methane leases right on the borders of our reservation without even consulting our tribe. So we filed a lawsuit against them.

[00:19:07.48] Here we sit. Our hands are tied. Everything's been done. We've been raped, and we didn't even know it. What can we do? We can't close our legs.

[00:19:19.78] This has been going on for a long time. I don't know what to say to you.

[00:19:24.63] You've forced the tribe's hand. You've made us very angry. The wells are already going in. You're coming in now, but you've already done everything.

[00:19:36.37] We have to establish some type of protocol where we don't have to worry about when we approve a project, it's going to go into some kind of litigation. And that's why we're here today.

[00:19:49.68] Protocol means trust and respect, and you haven't showed that you trust or respect us by even reaching out to us before you start approving all these wells and drilling them. And you come in here at the last minute because the tribe sued you. So you assure us that you're not going to let no more wells come in out there. You're not going to dump no more water into our river.

[00:20:14.69] You hold up everything until we work out an agreement here. Protect our culture. Otherwise, you're wasting our time.

[00:20:40.15] The federal government is supposed to assist Indian tribes in protecting our interests so that we have a homeland in perpetuity. That's what a federal trustee is supposed to do. Instead, we have been forced to suing them. What limited money we have is spent suing them, our trustee.

[00:20:59.65] And our ancestors didn't walk back here for nothing. And like I said to them, maybe if you walked back too, you would see it from a different standpoint of view.

[00:21:09.28] But we're fighting back pretty good.

[00:21:10.93] Yes.

[00:21:12.56] Overall.

[00:21:13.29] [LAUGHTER]

[00:21:14.63] Overwhelming odds.

[00:21:15.97] Overwhelming odds, yes.

[00:21:18.54] Every day, a woman like Gail Small-- as these communities wake up, and they wonder who is coming after them today. You go to sleep. You win. And you wake up the next morning, and the Bush administration has leased something else or some new evil is coming towards your community.

[00:21:37.73] And they call this-- one of my friends, she's a psychologist and social worker for an Indian community. She calls it ethnostress. You wake up in the morning, you're still Indian.

[00:21:59.25] The coal wars go on, but one victory we all celebrate is that we now have a high school on our reservation. The kids were tired of being called prairie niggers, just like I was when I was a kid.

[00:22:16.00] [BUZZER]

[00:22:16.49] Team!

[00:22:16.98] [CHEERING]

[00:22:26.26] So I go to the games, and then that's when I feel real proud that hey, I was a little part of this, in getting this high school. We are proud that we are Cheyenne and that we still live in our indigenous land, and that sustains us. It'll sustain our children and their children.

[00:23:00.12] Genocide is the destruction of a people and their culture, and unless we face up to the fact that destruction of these tribes is at a point where they may not be able to survive much longer-- we are at that point here. You put in 75,000 methane gas wells around our reservation. You take our groundwater, pollute our air, destroy our rivers. The Cheyenne here will probably not be able to survive.

[00:23:34.76] We'll have a wasteland here. That's what's at stake here. Where will the Cheyenne go?

[00:24:00.06] In the far northeastern corner of Alaska lies the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Next to this pristine wilderness is Arctic Village, one of the most remote settlements in Alaska. It's 75 miles north of the Arctic Circle, and 100 miles from the nearest road.

[00:24:22.66] This is where my tribe, the Gwich'in Athabaskan Indians, have lived and hunted for over 10,000 years. All the villages and tribes of the Gwich'in Nation are all lined up right along the route of the Porcupine caribou herd. Their survival is our survival.

[00:24:45.74] [BIRDS CHIRPING]

[00:24:51.20] [CHATTER]

[00:25:10.54] [SINGING IN GWICH'IN]

[00:25:39.01] My ancestors are the oldest inhabitants of the Americas. If the caribou go away, our whole tradition and our culture would change, and the next generation would be lost. The protection of this area became a fight that consumed not only my people, but also my life from the time I was very young.

[00:26:08.66] I remember when I was 13 years old. It was when I first started having strong dreams. In my dreams, I was always being shown that I could do a lot of things in the world. I could make a lot of positive changes happen.

[00:26:25.77] At the time, I didn't know what to think about it, and I thought that I was half crazy. How could anyone be capable of helping to promote such changes in the world? It just didn't make sense. Later on, I realized that they were in fact real.

[00:26:39.69] [SINGING IN GWICH'IN]

[00:26:41.69] My mother sent me to Arctic Village when I was a young boy to be raised traditionally. When I was about 10 years old, when we woke up, 15 or 20 caribou right there in the front yard. You even had to push them out of the way to go to the bathroom.

[00:27:01.58] Yes, I know.

[00:27:03.56] They were everywhere. In 1960, the Republican administration under President Eisenhower had the wisdom to set aside the Arctic Range as a protected area. Only eight years later, just west of the Arctic Range at Prudhoe Bay, a major oil site was discovered. Only the richest oil companies stood a chance at getting a piece of Alaska.

[00:27:50.92] Phillips Petroleum Company, Mobil Oil Corporation, Standard Oil Company of California. That's 18,660,000.

[00:28:08.01] Not surprisingly, in 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was passed. It stripped Alaskan Native peoples of the vast majority of our traditional lands and resources and set up Native Corporations.

[00:28:26.81] That money earned by the corporations will be a source of long-term income for Alaskan Natives. This amounts to about \$60 per year, so that by the end of the fifth year, each Native who lives in a village will have received approximately \$300.

[00:28:47.92] Without negotiation, a unilateral act of Congress simply decreed that most of our traditional lands were no longer our own.

[00:28:57.05] You have Alaska Native Corporations who benefit and are set up specifically for the purpose of exploiting the resources of the land. And so you have communities that have been forced to transform into an appendage to American culture.

[00:29:13.68] While other Alaska Natives were forced to become part of federally-established Corporations, we chose to resist in order to retain ownership of a portion of our traditional lands as a tribe.

[00:29:27.59] The Gwich'in are some people that have said no. They have said we're going to keep our traditional systems, and we're going to keep this way of life. And this is worth everything to us.

[00:29:38.67] When I was 17 years old, I began getting mentored by other chiefs and leaders within the Native community. They began seeing me make speeches and being here and there.

They took the time to train me into different types of both traditional knowledge and Western knowledge that I was going to need to know.

[00:29:53.17] And a lot of the people started asking me if I thought I would be able to handle moving in as a chief. I was 23 years old, and it's half the age of what normally a person would be moving into that kind of a position. I was elected, and it was still controversial and strange because I was so young. So I talked with each of the elders, and one by one they gave me their blessings.

[00:30:16.96] Our leadership among our tribes have to deal with other peoples that are coming into our lands and territories and using really complex Western laws and strategies to get at our land and resources or to divide our peoples. And so I knew that kind of knowledge was needed, and I thought, well, if I'm healthy, I love my people, and I have that ability to understand those Western complex things, then maybe I'll be able to help my people in that role for a few years.

[00:30:47.52] A lot of my time, since we don't really have one or two Western-educated people, is to be in there trying to help educate more of our own people in there how to really run those things and how to manage programs and work with the computers and all of this stuff.

[00:31:20.10] Expanding on the original land set aside by President Eisenhower, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1980 to protect this delicate wilderness area. The Arctic Refuge protected 5% of Alaska's coast. The other 95% was already opened to drilling.

[00:31:42.08] [CHURCH BELL]

[00:31:47.25] In 1987, our people discovered the oil companies wanted to drill in this protected area. The focal point of drilling would occur right in the middle of a small area where the Porcupine caribou herd migrates every year to give birth to its young. We call it "the sacred place where life begins." Even in times of famine long ago, we would not go there and intrude upon the caribou when they're giving birth to their young.

[00:32:23.55] We have an exceptionally difficult situation because we have a very narrow strip of coastal plain where the caribou rely on for their calving. And then if we introduce oil and gas development in the middle of that, there literally is no good place for these caribou to go to have their calves.

[00:32:45.46] It's similar to the Plains Indian beliefs with the buffalo, that they were one and the same, part of each other. We seen what happened when the Buffalo were nearly wiped out. That's what's going to happen to the Gwich'in, and we know that. That's why we're fighting so hard to protect that area.

[00:33:09.34] In the evening of March 23, 1989, at the opposite end of Alaska, the oil tanker Exxon Valdez went aground in Prince William Sound, leaking 11 million gallons of oil and destroying the ecology of well over 1,000 miles of Alaska's coast. Big oil laid low after the Exxon Valdez, but then President George H. W. Bush made drilling rights in the Arctic Refuge a

plank of his energy policy. Faced with the threat that drilling represented to the caribou, the Gwich'in turned to our elders for guidance.

[00:33:49.80] The eldest Gwich'in woman, she was over 100 years old. She advised our leaders on how we're going to face this threat. She told our people that we need to hold a traditional gathering and discuss the issue in our own traditional way.

[00:34:07.00] We called together our nation-- all of our villages in Canada, all of our villages here in Alaska-- and we brought them all in. We brought in our leaders, our elders, and our young people. What was very powerful, we didn't just decide that we're going to stand up to the oil companies, stand up to the state of Alaska, stand up to this billion dollar industry. What happened was when we're making an important decision, we hold prayer. We have ceremony, and then we decide.

[00:34:47.74] After our gathering, our people decided that there is no way that we're going to allow the oil companies to go into the calving grounds. Then the elders went further, and they decided that we needed a political arm to represent our nation.

[00:35:10.01] Eight leaders were selected to be members of the Gwich'in Steering Committee.

[00:35:30.58] They began to go out into the world to lobby and speak out against the drilling to other Native groups, the United Nations, and to Congress year after year.

[00:35:40.26] The Gwich'in have been key in the struggle to protect ANWR. So you cannot overstate the significance of people who can struggle against the largest corporations in the world for 30 years. And how amazing that resilience is and that wellspring of spirituality and wellspring of their ancestors working with them and just that wellspring of power.

[00:36:03.64] I have always been inspired by the legacy of resistance and strength from my tribe. Even before I got moved into being a chief here, I was very active in the Native community and in the social change community. We talked about what is globalization. Are there good things about it or--

[00:36:21.55] At a youth gathering, I met a young Navajo activist named Enei Begaye.

[00:36:25.96] There's an organization called Youth for Environmental Sanity.

[00:36:29.95] And we're together for a week doing all sorts of activities and stuff, learning from each other. And we handed around this hat that had everyone's name written in it. I told myself, if I pick her name out of this hat, it's going to mean something special.

[00:36:43.86] When we live down here we have to have a corn field, and you're going to be a shepherd.

[00:36:47.92] Yes, for once-- well, actually-- But 20 names had already been picked by that time it got to me, and I reached in the hat. And I pulled out a name, and sure enough, it said Enei on it.

[00:36:54.87] It was beautiful.

[00:36:58.37] I said, hmm.

[00:36:59.44] And then two weeks later, we were on the same delegation to South Africa.

[00:37:05.27] So both of us decided that we weren't ready to have a serious relationship because we were so dedicated to our work and to our lives and to our people, but then after spending two weeks together in South Africa, it was like, OK, we can't be apart from each other. That became clear down there, and at one point I wrote this poem.

[00:37:20.02] It says, "love will bind us. Beauty will be the path. Stars shall be our guide. Balance will be the way. Spirit will carry us through. My love is for you."

[00:37:32.35] He said, hey, want to come to Alaska? And I said, OK. I'd seen these beautiful pictures of the land up here. I never expected I would live up here.

[00:38:00.78] Because of my responsibilities as Chief of Arctic Village, Enei agreed to come here, far away from her family and familiar landscape.

[00:38:26.80] When I got up here, I mean, just everything blew me away. The fact that the first day I got off the plane, and we went fishing and got our dinner for that night.

[00:39:11.48] The caribou are vital to the social fabric of the Gwich'in Nation. It is during the hunt when knowledge is passed down from our elders to the next generation.

[00:39:20.25] [MUSIC - PETER KATER AND R. CARLOS NAKAI, "CARIBOU DREAMS/OMAHA

[00:39:24.30] SONG"]

[00:39:29.33] For thousands of years, our land had no borders. Now, we have to cross an imaginary line into what is called Canada.

[00:40:00.83] Check out those [INAUDIBLE] bulls. You take that one in front, and I'll take one in the back, right?

[00:40:04.88] All right.

[00:40:05.69] You ready? Take that one in front.

[00:40:08.56] OK.

[00:40:10.97] [GUN SHOTS]

[00:40:11.97]

[00:40:15.97] When we come out with elders, no matter how old or young you are, we're all learning every time. I still got lots to learn about the best way to cut a caribou.

[00:40:29.82] A native person harvesting in an ecosystem, whether it is caribou, whether it is fish, whether it is deer, or whether it is a Makah whale, is something which totally rankles a lot of environmentalists because there is this unreconciled relationship between a settler society and an indigenous society, or a Native society. And so the Gwich'in are part of redefining that and saying we are people that live here. We rely on this caribou herd, and yes, we are carnivores. And we're eating these caribou because we worked out our relationship with them a long time ago.

[00:41:11.38] The practice of coming out here and being on the land and hunting caribou is not only about feeding our families, because it is about that because this is all we have to survive from. We don't have Safeways and Walmarts and stuff like that in our tribes. But it's also about maintaining our culture and our spiritual relationship with these animals that we've had for time immemorial.

[00:41:35.63] In Gwich'in creation stories, the caribou has a piece of man's heart in his heart, and man has a piece of caribou's heart in his so that each will always know what the other is doing.

[00:42:01.22] It's the time of year where we have to go out and gather all the meat that's going to last us throughout the wintertime until the springtime. So it's a really important time of year. It's an exciting time of year. A lot of people around here, with a lot of caribou and moose that they got, they put up little racks in their houses that are just lines of sticks one way and the other way, and they hang up the meat.

[00:42:27.18] They cut it. They skin it around like this. And the skin, they make boots out of it.

[00:42:41.73] The fight for the Refuge began to heat up when George W. Bush, like his father, featured drilling in the Refuge as a platform of his energy policy.

[00:42:50.22] There's been a lot of comment about ANWR during this entire process and many pictures, and--

[00:42:56.68] The Senator's time has expired.

[00:42:57.03] --I would propose to my colleagues a picture of ANWR as it exists for about nine months of the year.

[00:43:02.31] [LAUGHTER]

[00:43:03.10] This is what it looks like. Don't be misinformed. It's a long, dark, nine month winter.

[00:43:14.76] The snow and the Northern Lights is like Christmas all the time.

[00:43:29.18] One thing that we learned right away was that if we're going to keep up with the struggles and the work we're doing, we have to be working almost at the same speed that those people who are working to try to create the opposite changes are working at. Otherwise, they get ahead of us. It makes it tough for us, too, because it's a different lifestyle pace.

[00:43:45.94] For us, we're used to living life based on when it gets cold, we dress warmer. When we're running out of meat, we go out and hunt for more. When we get tired, we go to sleep. When we're done being tired, we wake up. We live on a natural lifeway, and then when we all of a sudden have to jump up and get involved in Western governance-type systems and setups and campaigns, it's a totally different pace. And that's a challenge in and of itself for a lot of our people.

[00:44:14.29] We could probably save as much oil as in the entire Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by just properly inflating the tires on our automobiles.

[00:44:29.47] In a consuming culture, which consumes a third of the world's resources, it requires constant intervention into other people's territories and constant violations of other people's human rights. That is the reality if you consume more than you need and more than you can produce in any semblance of a relationship that is not only equitable but sustainable.

[00:44:55.59] There's a prophecy. It's called voice from the north. There's going to come a time when a voice from the north is going to rise. When that voice from the north rises, it signifies a time for humankind to change their ways.

[00:45:11.31] How do we really make all these great visions that we have possible? And that, I believe, starts with the family.

[00:45:18.02] We decided that everything that we believe in and that we work for is to be able to allow people to live good lives and be happy together.

[00:45:24.98] Now we're going to have a little one in March. So I've got to buy bigger winter clothes.

[00:45:59.28] [GEIGER COUNTER]

[00:46:10.19] The atomic age can serve man and not destroy him.

[00:46:14.25] The development of atomic energy in the US is the responsibility of the Atomic Energy Commission, the AEC. Now heavily dependent upon rich ore imported from Canada and the Belgian Congo, the AEC is encouraging the development of domestic uranium deposits.

[00:46:32.21] Near abandoned uranium mines, a Geiger counter picked up sounds of radiation, a legacy of the Cold War that the Navajos believe caused disease and death at the hands of the US Government.

[00:46:46.41] When I started working in our mine, I was only 22 years old. There was no protection clothes. I used to pick out the big ore, and I'd put it in the cart with my own bare hands, no glove.

[00:47:07.72] This is your chest when they put the [INAUDIBLE] on you.

[00:47:10.34] Yes.

[00:47:11.60] What I'm going to have the radiologist do, though, is to look for very specific changes and see whether he thinks that this may be related to the uranium mining that you had.

[00:47:21.34] [COUGHING]

[00:47:21.97] And then they'll determine whether they think you would qualify or be compensated under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

[00:47:33.96] Only time they allowed us to go outside is quitting time. You wanted to use the bathroom? We just used it here. There's no toilet tissue, nothing, and so we just used the ore and cleaned ourselves with that.

[00:47:54.83] So Mr. James, these are the releases. Mr. James, we'd like to do a blood test. So this feels like a little bit of an ant bite. Hagoonee'.

[00:48:10.62] Hagoonee'.

[00:48:12.53] There's no drinking waters that we could drink when we get thirsty, and so we just used the water that's inside of the mine, which is that have a lot of radiations.

[00:48:29.09] Mr. Platero, I'm Dr. Fogarty. I'm one of the family practice doctors here in Crownpoint. Did they biopsy your kidney? Did they--

[00:48:35.79] Yes.

[00:48:36.44] They did.

[00:48:37.04] My kidney was not doing the job.

[00:48:39.86] OK.

[00:48:41.35] The people that we used to work with, most of the people there are gone. They're gone.

[00:48:48.37] Since the 1950s, over a thousand former Navajo miners have died from exposure to uranium.

[00:48:55.61] Uranium is a poison. If you inhale it, it leads to lung cancer. If you drink it, it can lead to kidney failure, renal failure. So it doesn't matter how you come in contact with uranium, it is a poison.

[00:49:13.32] Dr. Victor Archer, who worked for the US Public Health Service in the '50s says his agency warned the Atomic Energy Commission that the radiation could produce an epidemic of lung cancer, recommending the mines be ventilated.

[00:49:28.86] I remember my dad being covered with dust. And then my dad would come home, and I would smell that smell on him. And it just became a part of him, and to me, that smell was my dad. It was 15 of us that lived in here plus my mom, my dad.

[00:49:55.06] And I remember him coming down that hill after work. My youngest brother was three when he would say, where's Dad? And he would look up, looking for him. We just told him that he won't come back down again, and he didn't understand.

[00:50:16.43] After my father died, my mother had to make rugs, and she would go sell it to get money. And it takes forever to make rugs. And there was eight siblings at home.

[00:50:32.96] [SPEAKING NAVAJO]

[00:50:36.98] She said they had an account at the trading post, and they closed it. She wanted Kerr-McGee to pay that bill at the trading post, but that didn't happen.

[00:50:50.29] [BLEATING]

[00:51:03.71] There were more than a thousand mining operations that took place on Navajo Nation.

[00:51:08.42] [EXPLOSIONS]

[00:51:08.89] While they were working, they blasted away the ore, and they would be covered in uranium dust. So they would bring home their jackets at the end of the day, have their wives clean it.

[00:51:25.63] And I used to shake them and throw them in the wash machine.

[00:51:29.37] You used to shake the clothes before you would do that?

[00:51:31.25] Shake the clothes, and-- because if he let all that dirt on it, they don't like it at the laundromat.

[00:51:41.04] The former miners, they go home. They sleep with their working clothes at night. And some of them, they don't wash their hands, and they touch their woman like that at night. This is how they exposed to radiation. They murdered my father and my mother.

[00:52:29.84] Crownpoint was slated to be the center of major uranium development for the southwest United States. This area has been called the, quote, "Saudi Arabia of uranium" by the mining companies. There was going to be mining operations really as far as the eye can see. Fortunately for the town of Crownpoint, Three Mile Island happened.

[00:52:52.31] At the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, a malfunctioning meter almost caused a serious meltdown. The US narrowly escaped a major disaster, and the uranium industry bottomed out.

[00:53:04.70] In 1980, as a result of a drop in the price of uranium, Westinghouse elected to get out of the uranium business. This whole area was destined to be the home for an underground uranium mine.

[00:53:21.61] In 1994, we were living a quiet, comfortable life in our hometown of Crownpoint on the Navajo Reservation.

[00:53:31.16] We've been married for 34 years now.

[00:53:36.54] And we both hold full-time jobs. Crownpoint Mid School, this is Rita. Yes, hold on. I've worked for over 25 years in our local schools, and Mitchell is a supervisor for the Navajo Utilities. We have four children, and my youngest one is here at the junior high where I work.

[00:54:17.76] In 1994, in the evening, we were here at home, and Mitchell brought the paper home as he does every day. And we both read it about two or three times in disbelief, that uranium mining is to begin in Crownpoint and Churchrock. They're starting up again.

[00:54:35.91] From here, you can see the whole town of Crownpoint. Mitchell and Rita live just below the water tank there in the distance, and as you can see, very, very close to where the Hydro Resources, Incorporated plans to put the uranium mine.

[00:54:49.77] Without any public hearings, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission granted permission for the deadly carcinogen to be mined right next to Crownpoint schools and churches.

[00:55:00.39] I don't understand NRC, the United States government, why they could do this again, why they would have a mining like this near our community.

[00:55:10.65] The NRC had granted permission for the Texas-based company to conduct the mining with a process called in situ leach mining.

[00:55:18.99] The mining company intends to inject chemicals down into the aquifer next to the community water supply. Those chemicals will leach, or strip, the uranium off of the rock into the aquifer, creating basically a toxic soup.

[00:55:38.00] Rita start to ask me question, isn't this what you have worked before-- this kind of mining, in situ leach mining? I said, yes.

[00:55:46.94] Mitchell worked as a lab technician for Mobil Oil in the 1980s.

[00:55:52.37] Mobil was doing a pilot project with in situ leach mining west of Crownpoint. I worked in the lab with engineers, and no matter how hard we tried, we could never get all the uranium out of the water. We closed the project. This is what made me start thinking about the environment, especially our water.

[00:56:13.24] We talked about having a community meeting.

[00:56:15.95] And we decided to do something about it.

[00:56:18.63] We put an article in the newspaper. To our surprise, at our first meeting, close to 50 community members came to that meeting. There were so many people there, a lot of faces I've never seen before. But when we went up there to talk about it, right away we had landowners started to tell us we should stay out of their business, that's their land, and they can do whatever they want.

[00:56:51.09] It was scary. It was humiliating. It just felt like the whole community just split.

[00:57:01.15] There were people who stood up and accused them of anything from witchcraft to taking food out of the mouths of their grandchildren and standing in the way of people making lots of money off of the uranium leases.

[00:57:14.34] We lost some friends. That's something that was real sad for us. We never wanted that to happen in our community.

[00:57:24.60] This proposal split families. You just didn't split the community, and it didn't split clans. It split blood families.

[00:57:32.73] There were some scary times when we were told, just be careful, just take care of yourself. So I had to really protect my family. That's one of the reasons why Mitchell and I really had to find faith, and three years ago, we became members of the Catholic Church.

[00:57:52.96] [SINGING A HYMN]

[00:58:02.96] There's a few families. They own the mineral rights for their land, and in the distance, you can see the area around where the mining company is. That's owned by a few Navajo families. Those families had been promised huge sums of money by the mining company, and they had been told that this mining process is, quote, "safe."

[00:58:26.51] I think when HRI approached my family, the first question was, is it safe? We arranged with the HRI people to actually go to a mine where it's in operation. I even touched some of the uranium that was there, and I read about it. I asked questions a lot, and I think HRI did a good job because they took us down there.

[00:58:49.39] We're not fighting with land owners, allottees.

[00:58:54.44] We're fighting with this company.

[00:58:57.70] The mother company of HRI, Uranium Resources, have worked with this technology for 30 years in south Texas. So that experience, that's what they're going to use here to mine uranium.

[00:59:12.73] With in situ mining we drill wells. No one ever goes underground. There are no occupational hazards associated with underground mining in solution mining.

[00:59:23.11] In fact, our miners our electric pumps. We use natural groundwater to leach the uranium. It's brought to the surface, and what we add is we add oxygen and possibly some carbonate-- club soda-- to the water where it's re-injected into the ground.

[00:59:41.05] The action of pumping dissolved oxygen and sodium bicarbonate into the rocks causes that uranium concentration to increase almost 100,000 times. So you go from very high-quality, pristine water, and you make it a toxic soup. Nobody could drink it.

[00:59:58.90] It's safe as long as it's contained, and as you can see here in this jar, it is contained.

[01:00:04.91] So the company has to make sure that none of that stuff escapes because it's a poison.

[01:00:10.18] The entire well field is circled by monitor wells.

[01:00:15.82] Because the underground buried streambeds are narrower than the distance between the monitor wells, our fear is that a leakage of the mining fluids will escape, go past those monitoring wells, and never be detected.

[01:00:28.33] We have experts and hydrologists that have shown that that contamination will reach the drinking wells within less than seven years. It will-- if this mine goes through-- destroy the only source of drinking water for 15,000 people.

[01:00:47.65] We're tired of it. This time they're not going to walk all over us like they did then.

[01:00:52.17] And we start to organize a community group.

[01:00:54.94] We finally came up with our name, ENDAUM, which stands for the Eastern Navajo Dine Against Uranium Mining. It was really funny. Mitchell and I, we had never been involved in politics or anything like that before.

[01:01:11.96] We created the public awareness.

[01:01:15.29] And that's what people are wanting. They're wanting information.

[01:01:19.73] We tried to talk about facts. HRI is feeding them the wrong information. I started to drive around in our community. I felt like I was like Paul Revere, trying to-- here comes the mining!

[01:01:36.74] I'd like to turn the floor over to Mitchell Capitan, the founder of ENDAUM.

[01:01:44.08] [APPLAUSE]

[01:01:52.06] We need to ask the Council, our Navajo Nation president, why are we going to go to something that already that have hurt our people? We need to turn that around.

[01:02:04.24] At the end, we got more votes to oppose the mining. Pretty soon, we had a petition that went around with over 1,600 names saying no to uranium.

[01:02:16.81] Despite local opposition, the energy bills of 2001 and 2003 contained measures to revive the failing nuclear industry and, in particular, millions of dollars of subsidies for in situ leach mining.

[01:02:30.52] One of the companies that would qualify under the wording of the proposed provisions right now is HRI's parent company in Texas, Uranium Resources, Incorporated, and you can imagine what a grant of \$10 million in a year, or \$30 million over three years, what infusion of cash that that would do for that company. Right now, that company is down to two employees.

[01:02:53.17] We had to intervene. We had to file so many papers with the NRC and testify.

[01:02:59.21] We filed the lawsuit to prove to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that this was not safe.

[01:03:07.00] We told them, would you let this happen at your backyard? Think about it. This is the same thing. We're just protecting our land.

[01:03:15.19] Would this happen in Santa Fe? Would this happen in Manhattan? Would this happen in San Francisco? No. I think this is a case of environmental racism.

[01:03:23.70] [BLEATING]

[01:03:26.47] [CHEERING]

[01:03:33.41] I'm sorry. I don't think you can do this and, at the end, say that your water's going to be safe enough for our children and generations to come. We might double our piles of paper here, but that's OK. We're going to continue to fight them.

[01:03:56.89] If Rita and Mitchell and other people in Crownpoint had not started the ENDAUM group and intervened to stop the license, there would have been mining.

[01:04:08.80] Looking at the corn pollen and uranium, they almost look the same. The corn pollen is a blessing. If we bring that uranium up for quick money, It's going to destroy us.

[01:04:25.25] With grassroots organizing and endless legal challenges, we have been able to block the new mine for nearly a decade.

[01:04:35.23] This is a community that is one of the lowest income in the country. Many of the people don't speak English. Many of the people don't have phones to be able to call their politicians. To think that a community with so few resources has been able to stop the uranium industry, the nuclear industry, it's an amazing success. It's an amazing win for grassroots democracy.

[01:04:57.97] [CHEERING]

[01:05:01.63] First down for the Eagles.

[01:05:06.47] Let's go Eagles!

[01:05:08.89] We have celebrated every victory, but with a renewed interest in nuclear power and the price of uranium rising, time may be running out for our community.

[01:05:33.22] [BIRDS CHIRPING]

[01:06:08.88] When you go to Katahdin, Katahdin meaning great mountain, you don't need any education before you get there. You don't need anybody preaching to you for you to get a real strong sense that this is a special place. When you see a stream coming out of the mountain, directly out of the mountain, there just isn't any place better.

[01:06:39.89] The water that we're seeing right here flowing through the reservation literally comes from Katahdin, the most sacred place on the planet. Yet here, the water's not viewed as sacred by industry. It's viewed as a pipe to the ocean, a sewer.

[01:07:03.05] Penobscot people once lived throughout the entire state of Maine. Today, our reservation is a series of small islands in the Penobscot River. Indian Island is the only one large enough to inhabit. That's where I grew up. It's only 30 miles downstream from Lincoln Pulp and Paper.

[01:07:37.44] [WATER GURGLING]

[01:07:40.44] This is the mill. This is its pipe, and this is our river. Here, you see a touch of foam.

[01:07:48.75] Before, when I'd come here to visit my grandfather, it was almost a foot thick. That's the landing there. We'd put in our canoes and paddle over to see my grandfather. You'd have the stuff dripping all over you, never knowing what it is.

[01:08:04.72] Probably spending about half the summer in the water, I realized that I had these lesions on my legs, these bad boils, and they weren't very pretty. And I just figured it was because of the water. So I stopped swimming, and they eventually subsided, but really never went away. This flows 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it flows through our reservation.

[01:08:50.62] Paper mills are located on rivers because they need to use a lot of water in the process of making pulp and paper, and then they need to discharge that water somewhere.

[01:08:58.33] A typical large pulp and paper mill would have something like 30 to 50 million gallons per day that needs to be treated and then discharged.

[01:09:06.91] What's in the discharge water is all the products of breaking down trees to make pulp. Byproducts of bleaching include things like dioxin. Dioxin is very long-lived in the environment. It doesn't break down.

[01:09:19.88] So when you make dioxin and you discharge it into your treatment plant, it's going to eventually end up in the river. Dioxin is a lipophilic compound, and a lipophilic compound means it literally-- it likes fat. So as it moves up the food chain, it gets into the fat cells of fish and concentrates.

[01:09:37.39] So by the time we get it in our bodies, our body burden is potentially much higher.

[01:09:43.75] Dioxin has a lot of bad health effects that are associated with it. Cancer is the one that people worry about the most.

[01:09:51.61] Within the Indian Island community, unfortunately, we have a cancer rate that's over twice what the average cancer rate is in the rest of the state of Maine. Because of our lifestyle, because of our practicing our culture, we are at a much greater risk. We're like the canary in the coal mine in that we're out here consuming resources directly from the river that are contaminated.

[01:10:28.19] [BIRDS CHIRPING]

[01:10:39.65] I spent a lot of time with my grandmother growing up on the reservation. She was very hopeful that the traditions of the Penobscot would live on, and I was the one that she looked to, I think, to make sure that the traditions were being carried on.

[01:11:02.11] In 1989, I started my own wilderness school where I would take people into the woods and teach them the old ways. OK, we are going to make a shelter that will save your life if you ever get lost. And like old John [INAUDIBLE] said, make sure that the [INAUDIBLE] right here is waist high.

[01:11:26.51] OK, let's put those sticks right on. All the way down. All the way in, and lay down.

[01:11:42.86] And what a great feeling was to bring 10, 15 people, their kids, and we'd do shelters here. And I'd teach people how to track and gather wild plants.

[01:11:52.50] [LAUGHTER]

[01:11:55.80] I conducted these wilderness camps for kids on my grandfather's land until we realized how dangerous the fallout still was from the paper mill across the river. I'd come to believe that two decades of the Clean Water Act had made the river safe.

[01:12:15.80] About our third outing, people had started complaining, and they were complaining about skin rash and headaches. About the fourth campout, I finally started recognizing that myself. So that was our last campout here.

[01:12:30.99] Around the same time, rather than regulate the paper industry, the state of Maine posted health warnings that advised eating as little as one eight-ounce serving of fish per month. We were used to eating four times that in a week. Pregnant women and children were told to eat no fish at all.

[01:12:48.97] It's like you catch a fish, and you pick it up. And you hold a cigarette in your hand, and you say, well, which one do I dare take? And then you think, well, what's the difference?

[01:13:01.44] There's no difference here. You eat the fish, you'll get sick. You smoke the cigarette, you'll get sick.

[01:13:06.60] So it's your choice. It was a choice. I'd rather eat the fish, so-- If we can't fish, we lose our identity. We lose who we are as a people.

[01:13:17.73] This is us. This is who we are. The fish are us. We're all connected. We're all related.

[01:13:27.23] [MUSIC - SPIRIT OF THE DAWN, PENOBSCOT AND PASSAMAQUODDY

[01:13:31.20] SINGERS, "GREETING SONG"]

[01:13:34.46] We are communities that still retain our relationship to land. We eat our fish that the creator gave us to eat. We eat our wild rice. We eat our medicines.

[01:13:46.30] You bring in the dioxin of a pulp and paper mill, and then you tell me how we as people are supposed to continue as who we are. It is impossible. So it is very simply a human rights struggle.

[01:14:08.10] The simple fact is if we as consumers didn't demand white paper, there'd be no need for the bleaching that produces dioxin.

[01:14:18.95] Do we really have to sacrifice our rivers to make toilet paper? Is it that important to have to cause cancer for that? There are other ways of producing this paper.

[01:14:33.40] It's done in America. It's done in Europe. These companies have European counterparts that produce paper in a closed loop.

[01:14:44.49] A lot of the European plants are new facilities, and you can build in a lot more environmental controls economically in a new facility as you're starting it than you can go to an older facility and make retrofits.

[01:15:09.41] The state government apparently has prioritized economics over the environmental health of a whole race of people that have been here for thousands and thousands of years. That's the nub of the issue that really does make me angry.

[01:15:28.07] Anybody who wants to discharge to a river has to get a permit, has to get a license, and the license becomes a mechanism for requiring certain things to happen before you can discharge to a river.

[01:15:41.12] Over the last 30 years, there have been hundreds of violations of these permits. The state, knowing of these violations, has done their job. They've reported them, and they've issued fines. Those fines amount to, on a yearly average, \$3,000. \$3,000 a year for basically the right to dump billions of gallons of untreated wastewater directly into the river.

[01:16:24.39] Now, I'm sure you've heard the old saying about the fox guarding the henhouse. Well, this is a classic example in my mind.

[01:16:31.87] The paper mills for generations have done just about what they wanted on this river. The state of Maine supported them because they were a very important economic part of the state of Maine. Paper mills had the biggest lobby in the state legislature.

[01:16:46.43] [INAUDIBLE] this communication be placed on file. Closed.

[01:16:50.94] We believe that because of that influence, the state government cannot adequately protect this river. So one of the things that we began was a monitoring program. Although the state government was doing a significant amount of monitoring, we weren't sure that we could trust them 100%.

[01:17:14.67] Our water quality data showed that there was some elevated levels of pH, acidity, coming out of that discharge, and we notified the Maine DEP about these hits we were getting. They discovered that the equipment that they should have been using to monitor water quality in the discharge was sitting on the shelf collecting cobwebs.

[01:17:42.34] In 2000, I was elected to the position of tribal chief. My top priority-- clean up the Penobscot River. Around the same time, we learned that the state had petitioned the federal Environmental Protection Agency to take sole responsibility for issuing the discharge permits in Maine waters. We quickly urged the EPA to deny the state's request.

[01:18:11.50] The Penobscots believe that by maintaining the EPA, the federal government, as the primary issuer of those permits, that they would have a much more direct opportunity to influence those permits.

[01:18:27.29] The state sent to the federal government a request for documents and all correspondence between the EPA and the tribes. At the exact same time, three paper mills teamed up and issued the exact same request, word for word, to the tribes requesting to see our documents.

[01:18:49.76] I didn't look at that move by the paper companies to seek those documents as a documents issue or a Freedom of Information issue. I thought it was just another way for the paper companies and the state of Maine to undermine our sovereignty.

[01:19:06.66] We told the mills that, as a sovereign tribe, we did not come under the Maine state Freedom of Access Act. They took us to court, state court.

[01:19:15.85] The Penobscot Nation says they should have the right to take care of their own waters, and now they're taking the fight to court.

[01:19:21.92] What began as a dispute with paper companies over water quality has become a rallying point for Native American people of Maine. They fear at stake is their ability to self-govern as independent nations.

[01:19:33.65] This act of Maine government requesting the authority to oversee permits in Penobscot waters is an absolute insult.

[01:19:44.96] On November 9, 2000, just one week after my inauguration, the courtroom was packed when the case was heard by the Maine State Superior Court. We told the court that these documents were generated under Penobscot Nation governmental affairs. That is where we are a sovereign nation, and only the federal government has any authority to intervene in regards to tribal sovereignty. So we basically told the mills, no. And then we told the Superior Court judge, no, we're not going to hand you or anyone our documents.

[01:20:17.30] We were found in contempt of court by the Superior Court judge, and he sentenced us to jail. Here we are in the year 2000 and tribal leaders and chiefs are going to jail for protecting tribal sovereignty. We decided that as an honorable government, we will, as we always have, work with other governments on a government to government level.

[01:20:44.43] We refused to give the papers to the mills. Instead, we marched over 40 miles to present them at the state capitol.

[01:20:51.81] [CHEERING]

[01:20:59.19] In the end, the Bush EPA granted the discharge permitting authority to the state of Maine.

[01:21:05.40] And now the US Environmental Protection Agency ruled that the state of Maine has the authority to administer laws regarding pollution on Indian land.

[01:21:17.76] This is unprecedented. It's the first time in EPA history that they have sided with a state over a tribe. It's wrong. It's against their own policy. We'd like to know as soon as possible what that spill was up on the river.

[01:21:36.60] [BIRDS CHIRPING]

[01:21:39.94] There is a problem. I think that we're just going to have to fight a little bit harder than what we've been fighting. We have done a great job, but we still have a long ways to go. The river lasts forever. It should be taken care of.

[01:22:04.40] We're part of this economy. We have tribal members that work in some of these mills. We don't want to shut the mills down, but we want them to take a longer term view on the environment and adopt friendlier paper making processes so that they can continue to make paper, they can continue to thrive in terms of a viable business, but not at the expense of the environment.

[01:22:31.47] There is an ethical set of arguments and a moral set of arguments that are about how we are going to be able to live here, and that is the question that Barry Dana and the Penobscots are asking and demanding an answer to. And that is a question that is, in reality, an American question that must be asked. You got 100,000 chemicals in the environment right now. We have no idea of the combined impact of those chemicals, our body burden. We're all carrying well over our recommended daily allowance of dioxin right now.

[01:23:10.92] At what point will American industries and the American public say, we've had enough dioxin. And it's not just in the Penobscots, it's in us, and we've got the technology. And you cut your profit margin, and you do the right thing.

[01:23:25.92] [BIRDS CHIRPING]

[01:23:28.80] It's not just here. All over the country, 30 years of environmental protections are quietly being dismantled. Sometimes it seems like many Americans are blind to what's going on, but we don't have the luxury of looking the other way. We can't give up on the river.

[01:23:48.60] People are destroying the earth. It will be people to bring it back, and the wisdom that's going to be the driving force is held in this land's First People. It's our culture. It's our traditions and the values that come with those traditions that's basically going to save the planet.

[01:24:30.58] So we may seem far away and distant, and we never permeate the American media. We don't exist. But in reality, our reality is also your reality.

[01:24:41.99] [APPLAUSE]

[01:24:45.42] [DRUMS AND BELLS]

[01:24:51.79] This is my wife, Rita.

[01:25:05.06] We can stand up. The Gwich'in can stand up, and the Penobscots can stand up. The Northern Cheyenne can stand up. The Capitans can stand up. But their survival is contingent upon America changing. In the end, everyone's survival is contingent upon that.

[01:25:22.70] [MUSIC- ULALI, "MAHK JCHI"]