In the Matter of:
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
(High Level Waste Repository)

Docket No. 63-001
ASLBP Nos: 09-876-HLW-CAB-01
  09-877-HLW-CAB-02
  09-878-HLW-CAB-03

May 29, 2009

NATIVE COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL’S
BRIEF IN OPPOSITION TO NRC STAFF APPEAL

CURTIS G. BERKEY (CA State Bar No. 195485)
SCOTT W. WILLIAMS (CA State Bar No. 097966)
ROVIANNE A. LEIGH (CA State Bar No. 239035)
ALEXANDER, BERKEY, WILLIAMS & WEATHERS LLP
2030 Addison Street, Suite 410
Berkeley, California 94704
Telephone: 510/548-7070
Facsimile: 510/548-7080
E-mail: cberkey@abwwlaw.com
E-mail: swilliams@abwwlaw.com
E-mail: rleigh@abwwlaw.com

Attorneys for Intervenor
Native Community Action Council
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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Staff has appealed from the “Memorandum and Order (Identifying Participants and Admitted Contentions)” dated May 11, 2009. In general, the NRC Staff challenges the Construction Authorization Boards’ (Boards) decision to admit certain legal contentions. See, NRC Staff Notice of Appeal. Among the legal contentions which the Boards found admissible and which are challenged by NRC Staff, is one submitted by the Native Community Action Council (NCA): that the lands proposed for the Geologic Repository Operations Area are not without encumbrances (denominated NCA-MISC-001). See, NRC Staff Brief in Support of Appeal at 8, 29.

Curiously, the NRC Staff has not explained at all, anywhere in its brief, the basis for its challenge to the NCA lands contention.¹ Because of the complete failure to identify the basis of the appeal, NCA can do no more here than demonstrate, again, that its contention meets the standards for admissibility set forth in the regulations.

DISCUSSION

I. NRC STAFF’S FAILURE TO EXPLAIN THE BASIS OF ITS APPEAL CONSTITUTES A WAIVER OF THAT APPEAL

Both this Commission and the NCA are entitled to know the basis of the NRC Staff’s objections to the admissibility of the challenged contention. Advanced Medical Systems Inc. (One Factory Row, Geneva, Ohio 44041), CLI-94-6, 39 NRC 285, 297 (1994) (“The appellant bears the responsibility of clearly identifying the errors in the

¹ One must read the NRC Staff brief with a careful eye in order to catch the references to the NCA contention. NRC Staff Brief In Support of Appeal. The references appear only in a list of challenged contentions buried in the text (page 8) and in the conclusion (page 29). The NCA contention is otherwise not addressed at all.
For two reasons, NCA confines itself to a summary. It has previously fully briefed this issue, and the Board has agreed that the land contention is admissible. Reply of NCA to Department of Energy Answer to Petition, at 17-23 (filed March 11, 2009). Secondly, the volume of pleadings compiled thus far in this proceeding is enormous, and repetition is wasteful.

In the event that the Commission considers the appeal despite this failure, the NCA demonstrates that the Boards correctly admitted this contention.

II. THE NCA LANDS CONTENTION MEETS THE STANDARDS FOR ADMISSIBILITY SET FORTH IN 10 C.F.R. § 2.309(f).

The Boards determined that legal contentions may be admissible without necessarily demonstrating satisfaction of all requirements of § 2.309(f)(1). Memorandum and Order at 61. The NRC Staff takes issue with that determination. NRC Staff Brief at 5. Resolution of that dispute is not material to the admissibility of NCA’s contention, however, since the contention clearly satisfies the requirements of the regulation.

NCA summarizes here the nature of the land contention, and the manner in which it meets the requirements of the regulation. 2

§ 2.309(f)(1)(i) – specific statement of law or fact to be controverted, and identification of license criteria which cannot be met.

NCA, an organization representing Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute Indians, contends that the lands on which the Repository is proposed to be sited, is

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2 For two reasons, NCA confines itself to a summary. It has previously fully briefed this issue, and the Board has agreed that the land contention is admissible. Reply of NCA to Department of Energy Answer to Petition, at 17-23 (filed March 11, 2009). Secondly, the volume of pleadings compiled thus far in this proceeding is enormous, and repetition is wasteful.
encumbered by Shoshone claims to title. Applicable law requires that the DOE must acquire lands for the Repository that are “free and clear of all encumbrances, if significant . . .” 10 C.F.R. § 63.121(a)(1) and (2). The Tribes currently use, and have since time immemorial used the lands on which the Repository is proposed for construction – a factual matter which is not disputed. In addition, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has held that the United States’ claim to Shoshone lands is made in violation of fundamental human rights law – a legal determination the existence of which is not disputed. Dann v. United States, Case 11.140, Inter-Am.C.H.R., Report No. 75/02, Doc. 5 rev. 1 at 860 (2002). The issue of law or fact to be determined here is whether either, or both of these factors constitute an “encumbrance” within the meaning of § 63.121. If the nature of Tribal use of the land, or the existence of a decision finding that the United States’ claim to title is made in violation of law, constitutes an encumbrance within the meaning of the regulation, the application fails to meet all requirements of law.

§ 2.309(f)(1)(ii) – basis for contention.

The NCA has described in its reply and the attached affidavits, the use of Yucca Mountain lands by Indian people pursuant to a long-standing body of law and custom which regulates the nature, scope, frequency and purpose of such usage. Reply at 18 – 22. These factual and legal contentions are set forth in detail.

§ 2.309(f)(1)(iii) and (iv) – the issue of whether the lands are encumbered is within the scope of, and is material to the proceeding.

It cannot reasonably be disputed that if the Tribal use and International Human Rights Commission decision constitute “encumbrances” within the meaning of the
regulation, the license application fails to satisfy an essential condition. §63.121.

§ 2.309(f)(1)(v) – a concise statement of facts which support the contention, and on which the petitioner intends to rely at hearing.

The NCA has submitted affidavits which demonstrate that Yucca Mountain and its surrounding lands are used by Indian people for subsistence (hunting of game and gathering of plants for food), cultural, ceremonial and spiritual purposes; that use has been ongoing since time immemorial. It seems unlikely that these facts would be subject to dispute; but if they are, NCA will prove them at hearing.

In summary, the NCA has offered a contention, found admissible by the Boards, which meets every requirement of the regulation defining admissibility. The Boards’ decision to admit the contention is correct, and was neither “clear error [nor] abuse of discretion.”  *Progress Energy Carolinas, Inc. (Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant, Units 2 & 3* ), CLI -09-08, 69 NRC ___ (May 18, 2009) (slip op. at 7).

III. CONCLUSION

The NRC Staff appeal as to the Native Community Action Council’s land contention should be dismissed. The NRC Staff failed to disclose the basis of its objection to the Boards’ decision to admit the contention. The contention, in any event, meets all admissibility requirements of the regulation.

Date: May 29, 2009 Respectfully submitted

*Signed electronically by Scott W. Williams*
Scott W. Williams
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

ATOMIC SAFETY AND LICENSING BOARD

In the Matter of

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY       Docket No. 63-001

(License Application for Geologic Repository
At Yucca Mountain)

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on March 12, 2009, copies of the Native Community Action Council’s Brief in Opposition to NRC Staff Appeal have been served upon the following persons by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s Electronic Information Exchange:

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Atomic Safety and Licensing Board
Panel Mail Stop-T-3 F23
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Administrative Judges
Thomas S. Moore
E-mail: tsm2@nrc.gov
G. Paul Bollwerk
E-mail: gpb@nrc.gov
Anthony C. Eitreim, Esq. Chief Counsel
E-mail: ace1@nrc.gov

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of the Secretary of the Commission
Mail Stop 0-16C1
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Hearing Docket
E-mail: hearingdocket@nrc.gov
Emile L. Julian, Esq.
E-mail: eli@nrc.gov
Email: julian@nrc.gov
Rebecca Glitter
E-mail: r11@nrc.gov
E-mail: OGCMailCenter@nrc.gov
E-mail: OCAAMAIL@nrc.gov
Margaret Bupp
E-mail: mjb5@nrc.gov
Sara Culler
E-mail: sara.culler@nrc.gov
Deborah Davidson
E-mail: deborah.davidson@nrc.gov
Joseph Deucher
E-mail: jhd@nrc.gov

Daniel H. Fruchter
E-mail: Daniel.Fruchter@nrc.gov
Anthony Baratta
E-mail: ajb5@nrc.gov
Andrew L. Bates
E-mail: alb@nrc.gov
Lauren Bregman
E-mail: lrb1@nrc.gov
California Department of Justice
1300 1 Street
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550
Susan Durbin
Deputy Attorney General
E-mail: susan.durbin@doj.ca.gov

Michele Mercado
E-Mail: michele.mercado@doj.ca.gov

California Department of Justice
1515 Clay Street, 20th Floor
P.O. Box 70550
Oakland, CA 94612-0550
Timothy E. Sullivan
Deputy Attorney General
E-mail: timothy.sullivan@doj.ca.gov

California Department of Justice
300 S. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90013
Brian Hembacher
Deputy Attorney General
E-mail: brian.hembacher@doj.ca.gov

Talisman International, LLC
1000 Potomac St., NW
Suite 200 Washington, DC 20007
Patricia Larimore, Senior Paralegal
E-mail: plarimore@talisman-intl.com

State of Nevada
Marta Adams
100 North Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701
E-mail: madams@ag.nv.gov

Lincoln County, Nevada
Connie Simpkins
E-mail: jcciac@co.lincoln.nv.us

Nuclear Waste Project Office
1761 East College Parkway, Suite 118
Carson City, NV 89706
Steve Frishman, Tech. Policy Coordinator
E-mail: steve.frishman@gmail.com

Carter Ledyard & Milburn, LLP Counsel for Lincoln County
1401 Eye Street, N.W.
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
Barry S. Neuman, Esq.
E-mail: neuman@clm.com

Michele Mercado
E-Mail: michele.mercado@doj.ca.gov

California Department of Justice
1515 Clay Street, 20th Floor
P.O. Box 70550
Oakland, CA 94612-0550
Timothy E. Sullivan
Deputy Attorney General
E-mail: timothy.sullivan@doj.ca.gov

California Department of Justice
300 S. Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90013
Brian Hembacher
Deputy Attorney General
E-mail: brian.hembacher@doj.ca.gov

Talisman International, LLC
1000 Potomac St., NW
Suite 200 Washington, DC 20007
Patricia Larimore, Senior Paralegal
E-mail: plarimore@talisman-intl.com

United States Navy
Naval Sea Systems Command Nuclear Propulsion Program
1333 Isaac Hull Avenue, S.E.
Washington Navy Yard, Building 197
Washington, DC 20376
Frank Putzu, Esq.
E-mail: frank.putzu@navy.mil

Native Community Action Council
P.O. Box 140
Baker, NV 89311
Ian Zabarte
E-mail: mrizabarte@gmail.com

Armstrong Teasdale, LLP
Counsel for Churchill County, Lander County, Mineral County, and Esmeralda County
1975 Village Center Circle, Suite 140
Las Vegas, NV 89134-6237
Robert F. List, Esq.
E-mail: rlist@armstrongteasdale.com
Jennifer A. Gores
E-mail: jgores@armstrongteasdale.com

Eureka County, NV
Harmon, Curran, Spielberg & Eisenberg
1726 M Street N.W., Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20036
Diane Curran  
E-mail: dcurran@harmoncurran.com  
Matthew Fraser  
E-mail: mfraser@harmoncurran.com

Nuclear Energy Institute  
1776 I Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20006-3708  
Michael A. Bauser, Esq.  
Associate General Counsel  
E-mail: mab@nei.org  
Ellen C. Ginsberg, Esq.  
E-mail: ecg@nei.org

Anne Cottingham  
E-mail: awc@nei.org

Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, LLP  
Counsel for Nuclear Energy Institute, Inc.  
2300 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20037-1122  
Jay E. Silberg Esq.  
E-mail: jay.silberg@pillsburylaw.com  
Timothy J. Walsh, Esq.  
E-mail: timothy.walsh@pillsburylaw.com  
Maria Webb  
E-mail: maria.webb@pillsburylaw.com

Winston & Strawn  
David A. Repka  
E-mail: drepk@winston.com  
Carlos L. Sisco  
E-mail: csisco@winston.com  
William Horin  
E-mail: whorin@winston.com  
Rachel Miras-Wilson  
E-mail: rwilson@winston.com

NWOP Consulting, Inc.  
1705 Wildcat Lane  
Ogden, UT 84403  
Loreen Pitchford, LSN Coordinator  
For Churchill County, Eureka County, and Lander County  
E-mail: lpitchford@comcast.net

Yucca Mountain Project Licensing Group  
DOE/BSC Regulatory Programs  
1180 North Town Center Dr.  
Las Vegas, NV 89144  
Jeffrey Kriner  
E-mail: jeffrey.kriner@ym.gov  
Stephen Cereghino  
E-mail: stephen.cereghino@ym.gov  
Danny Howard  
E-mail: danny.howard@ym.gov  
Edward Borella  
E-mail: edward.borella@ym.gov

Fredericks & Peebles, LLP  
Counsel for Timbisha Shoshone Tribe  
1001 Second Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Darcie L. Houck, Esq.  
E-mail: dhouck@ndnlaw.com  
John M. Peebles  
E-mail: jpeebles@ndnlaw.com

Nye County  
Zoe Choate, Secretary  
E-mail: zchoat@co.nye.nv.us  
Sherry Dudley, Administrative Technical Coordinator  
E-mail: sdudley@co.nye.nv.us

Nye County (NV) Regulatory/ Licensing Adv.  
18160 Cottonwood Road, # 265  
Sunriver, OR 97707  
Malachy Murphy, Esq.  
E-mail: mrmurphy@chamberscable.com  
and  
Jeffrey D. VanNiel (Nye County,NV)  
530 Farrington Court  
Las Vegas, NV 89133  
E-mail: nbrjdv@gmail.com

Ackerman Senterfitt (Nye County, NV)  
801 Pennsylvannia Avenue, N.W., #600  
Washington, D.C. 20004  
Robert M. Anderson  
E-mail: robert.anderson@akerman.com

Inyo County, California  
Gregory L. James, Esq.  
Attorney for the County of Inyo
710 Autumn Leaves Circle
Bishop, California 93514
E-mail: gljames@earthlink.net

Timbisha Shoshone Yucca Mountain
Oversight Program Non-Profit
Corporation
3560 Savoy Boulevard
Pahrump, NV 89061
Joe Kennedy, Exec. Dir., Board Member
E-mail: joekennedy08@live.com

Tameka Vazquez
E-mail: purpose_driven@vahoo.com

Edwin Mueller
E-mail: muellered@msn.com

California Energy Commission
1516 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
Kevin W. Bell
Senior Staff Counsel
E-mail: kwbell@energy.state.ca.us

Clark County (NV) Nuclear Waste Div.
500 S. Grand Central Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89155

Caliente Hot Springs Resort, LLC
John H. Huston, Esq.
E-mail: johnhhuston@gmail.com

Abigail Johnson
E-mail: eurekanrc@gmail.com

Theodore Beutel
E-mail: tbeutel@eurekanv.org

Phil Klevorick
E-mail: klevorick@co.clark.nv.us

Clark County, Nevada
500 S. Grand Central Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89106
Elizabeth A. Vibert,
Deputy District Attorney

E-mail: VibertE@co.clark.nv.us
Jennings Strouss & Salmon, PLC
1700 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Suite 500
Washington, D.C., 20005
Elene Belete
E-mail: ebelete@jsslaw.com
Marc Gordon
E-mail: mgordon@jsslaw.com
Bryce Loveland
E-mail: bloveland@jsslaw.com
Alan I. Robbins
E-mail: arobbins@jsslaw.com
Debra D. Roby
E-mail: droby@jsslaw.com

Mike Simon
E-mail: wpnucastl@mwpower.net

Kevin Kamps
E-mail: kevin@beyondnuclear.org

White Pine County
White Pine County Dist. Attorney’s Office
801 Clark Street, Suite 3
Ely, NV 89301
Richard Sears, District Attorney
E-mail: rwsears@wpcdoa.org
Ronald Damele
E-mail: rdamele@eurekanv.org
Susan Lynch
E-mail: slynch1761@gmail.com

Mike Baughman
E-mail: bigboff@aol.com

Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP
Counsel for the U.S. Department of Energy
1111 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004
Donald J. Silverman
E-mail: dsilverman@morganlewis.com
Thomas A. Schmutz
E-mail: tschmutz@morganlewis.com
Thomas C. Poindexter
E-mail: tpoindexter@morganlewis.com
Alex S. Polonsky
E-mail: apolonsky@morganlewis.com
Paul J. Zaffuts  
E-mail: pzaffuts@morganlewis.com  
Lewis Csedrik  
E-mail: lcsedrik@morganlewis.com

Signed electronically by Scott W. Williams  
Scott W. Williams