

Princeton University is Profiting from the Destruction of Sacred Native Land

An Open Letter to the Princeton University Community, Student Groups, Divest Princeton, and the Board of Trustees

To the Princeton University community:

We support the movement to pressure universities, pension funds, charitable foundations, and government bodies to divest from the fossil fuel industry. Global warming is already harming us here in Nevada, the driest state in the country.

But in our haste to stop global warming, other issues are being overlooked. Here in Northern Paiute and Western Shoshone territory in Nevada, we are facing an influx of huge lithium mines threatening our land, water, and people driven by booming demand for electric car batteries and grid energy storage.

The most advanced of these projects is Lithium Americas Corporation's [Thacker Pass mine](#), which is on the brink of being built. Lithium Americas claims this would be a "green" mine, but that is a lie. How can a mine be green if it uses [700,000 tons of sulfur per year](#) and that sulfur comes from tar sands oil refineries? And here is the grand irony: that sulfur will come from oil refineries, likely from the tar sands. The mine itself would have carbon emissions equivalent to a small city.

Princeton University is the [fourth-largest single investor](#) in Lithium Americas Corporation, owning 2.4 million shares worth more than \$61 million. Lithium Americas has a track record of community abuse, environmental destruction, and lies. The company is 49% owner of a South American mining company called Minera Exar which has been [accused](#) of misleading and violating principles of free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous communities in the vicinity of their mine in Argentina.

Thacker Pass is a sacred site that has been occupied by Northern Paiute and Western Shoshone people since time immemorial. The mine threatens a massacre site where as many as 70 Paiute men, women, children, and elders were killed by the U.S. Army in a surprise attack on [September 12, 1865](#). Native

people have said "destroying this place is like bulldozing Arlington National Cemetery" and have been fighting to protect the site with public comments, protests, lawsuits, and more.

Operating the Thacker Pass lithium mine would be an environmental disaster. The mine area is critical habitat for the Greater sage-grouse, which is barely avoiding extinction (about 3% of their historic population remains). It's a migration corridor for pronghorn antelope and mule deer. It's nesting habitat for dozens of bird species. It's home to the last old-growth sagebrush habitat in the area. It's the only habitat for an endemic snail species. And the mine would use — and pollute — more than 4 million gallons of water daily.

This is just the beginning. There are more than 15,000 lithium mining claims in Nevada. Our region is set to become a sacrifice zone for wealthy people to be able to drive cars "guilt-free." But there is no such thing as "guilt-free" cars. A consumeristic society will not save the planet, no matter what is under the hood of the cars.

This is not just an issue for Nevada. It is a referendum for our nation. Will we double-down on the path of destroying the land to produce factory goods, or will we choose a path of true sustainability and justice?

We need your help. Princeton University must divest from Lithium Americas Corporation. To continue to profit from the destruction of land, water, wildlife habitat, and indigenous communities and sacred sites is morally reprehensible. Please, help us send a message that the transition away from fossil fuels cannot come at the expense of the planet and indigenous peoples.

Sincerely,

- 📍 Michon Eben, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony
- 📍 Dean Barlese, Spiritual Leader from the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe
- 📍 Inelda Sam, Elvida Crutcher, and Josephine Dick, Elders from the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe
- 📍 Will Falk, Attorney for the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony
- 📍 Max Wilbert, Protect Thacker Pass co-founder

Attached:

1. The National Congress of American Indians, Resolution #AK-21-027 "Supporting the Protection of Northern Paiute and Western Shoshone Ancestors and Cultural Lands at the Thacker Pass in Nevada and Protection of Eagles by Limiting Take Permits."