

CAMPAIGN ALERT

Global Response

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CAN PREVENT
DESTRUCTION
HERE!**



WIXÁRIKA (HUICHOL) PEOPLE OF MEXICO

Stop Mining, Protect Ancient Sacred Sites

Yauxali walks in Wirikuta with his son Pablito, teaching him the path of the ancestors. Photo by Juan Negrín.

For more than 1,000 years, the Wixárika (we-SHA-re-ka) people have made pilgrimages from their ceremonial centers in the Sierra Madre Mountains across the Chihuahua desert to Leunar, the sacred mountain where the sun first rose. The Wixárika pilgrims traverse over 300 miles to reach Leunar, stopping to give offerings and prayers at dozens of sacred places along the way—the natural temples of a deeply spiritual people. They undertake their journey, which they call their “essence,” to retrace the steps of creation, repeating the prayers of their ancestors in order to maintain the earth’s equilibrium and keep their culture alive.

The Wixárika people’s pilgrimage route and its destination are protected by state and federal law as well as international accords, but that hasn’t stopped a Canadian mining company, First Majestic Silver Corporation, from purchasing concessions to exploit the rich veins of silver that lie beneath the surface. In September, Wixárika communities issued a proclamation to stop the mine from desecrating their most sacred sites and endangering the fragile semi-desert ecosystem. Please send letters to Mexican authorities today. *Pamparius!*—thank you.

Silver mining is nothing new in Real de Catorce, a colonial town perched on the side of the Wixárika people's sacred mountain, Leunar, overlooking the Chihuahua Desert. During the 18th and 19th centuries, 225 million ounces of silver were dug out of this region, an unregulated enterprise that turned a forest into a desert and contaminated the scanty water supply. Now First Majestic Silver's CEO, Keith Neumeyer, says he expects to quadruple the plunder by using new methods (read cyanide) to extract silver from old tailings and by exploiting 12 miles of new veins.



Yauxali and his family gather around Our Grandfather Fire as they pray for abundance before nightfall in Wirikuta. Photo by Juan Negrin.

If this huge project is allowed to move forward, its impacts will be equally huge. Whether they dig the ore out of tunnels or excavate open pits, the mine will produce enormous quantities of tailings that could leach acid into the environment for centuries and blight the landscape in a region whose primary source of income is tourism. Dust, noise, erosion, road construction, water pollution, and blasting all affect wildlife, and the region's notable diversity of bird species—including 16 that are threatened—could plummet. Of most concern to the region's peasant farmers is the mine's potential impact on the water table in this semi-desert. Mines of this size use as much water in a day as a peasant family would use in 25 years.

First Majestic claims to be "eco-friendly," but Mexico's mining regulations are notoriously lax. Another Canadian company in the same state, San Luis Potosi, has been able to keep operating for years despite court orders to cease and desist. Disastrous cyanide leaks and spills occur too frequently.

So it is essential to stop First Majestic's Real de Catorce mine before it starts.

Seventy percent of First Majestic's mining concessions are within the borders of the Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve, which was created to protect the Wixárika people's pilgrimage route, their sacred sites, and the fragile semi-desert ecosystem that supports the highest diversity of cactus in the world. First Majestic's richest silver vein runs within meters of the Wixárika people's most sacred site.

State, federal, and international laws and accords for Indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and environmental protection were cited as justification for creating the Wirikuta Reserve in 1994. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the reserve protects one of the planet's three most biologically diverse desert ecosystems. UNESCO identified Wirikuta as one of only 14 potential World Heritage Sites of both cultural and ecological importance.

It is time to insist on real protection for the Wirikuta Reserve—not just words on paper. Please answer the Wixárika people's call and send letters to Mexican authorities today.

You Can Help

Write a Letter for this Campaign

The Traditional and Agrarian Authorities of the Wixárika People of the Mexican states of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Durango are asking world citizens to help them prevent First Majestic Silver Corporation from developing a mine at Real de Catorce in the state of San Luis Potosi. The proposed mine violates their rights and threatens a unique ecosystem. Please send polite letters to Mexican authorities.

Commend Mexico for guaranteeing the rights of Indigenous Peoples in its laws and constitution, for endorsing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and specifically for creating the Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve in the state of San Luis Potosi.

Express concern that the Canadian mining company, First Majestic Silver Corporation, plans to develop a huge silver mine at Real de Catorce, and 70 percent of its concession is within the Wirikuta Reserve. Large-scale mining would desecrate the Wixárika People's most sacred sites, violate their rights under Mexican laws and international accords, and threaten a unique, world-renowned semi-desert ecosystem.

Urge government officials to cancel all 22 concessions held by First Majestic at the Real de Catorce site. Ask them what they will do to permanently protect the sacred and natural values of the Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve.

Please send your letter to:

Lic. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa
 Presidente Constitucional de la República Mexicana,
 Residencia Oficial de los Pinos, Casa Miguel Alemán,
 Col. San Miguel Chapultepec, C.P. 11850,
 México D.F. Mexico
 FAX: +52 (55) 5093-4901
 E-mail: felipe.calderon@presidencia.gob.mx

Send a copy of your letter to:

Lic. Bruno Ferrari García de Alba, Secretario
 Secretaría de Economía
 Alfonso Reyes No. 30
 Col. Hipódromo Condesa C.P. 06140,
 Delegación Cuauhtémoc
 México D.F. MEXICO
 E-mail: bruno.ferrari@economia.gob.mx

Lic. Juan Rafael Elvira Quesada, Secretario
 Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales
 Blvd. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines 4209
 Jardines en la Montaña CP 14210 Tlalpan
 México D.F. MEXICO
 FAX: +52 (55) 5628-0643
 E-mail: c.secretario@semarnat.gob.mx

Tips:

US postage to Mexico is 98 cents.
 A model letter is available at www.cs.org
 Personal, mailed letters have highest impact!
 For more information, please see:
www.cs.org
www.wixarika.org (English & Spanish)
www.salvemoswirikuta.blogspot.com (Spanish only)

Thank you for joining in this campaign! Pamparius!



YOUTH ACTION ALERT

Global Response



WIXÁRIKA PEOPLE OF MEXICO

Stop Mining, Protect the Wirikuta Reserve!

This Wixárika mother, Kuainurie, and her son paint their faces with uxa during their pilgrimage to Wirikuta. Photo by Yvonne Negrin

Cultural Survival encourages children and teens to learn about Indigenous Peoples, especially how Indigenous communities organize to defend their rights and protect their lands. Sometimes, when governments and companies are not respecting their rights, Indigenous Peoples ask us to help them by writing letters.

Right now the Wixárika (we-SHA-re-ka) people of Mexico need our help. A Canadian mining company called First Majestic Silver Corporation plans to mine silver at a place called Real de Catorce. Most of the mining would take place inside the boundaries of the Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve. This reserve was created to protect the Wixárika people's sacred places and the unique plants and animals of this semi-desert region. The Wixárika people are asking us to help them stop the mine before it desecrates their sacred places and harms the environment. Will you help them by writing a letter to the president of Mexico?

The Wixárika people practice an ancient religion that has something in common with many other religions: a pilgrimage. Each year, they set out from their ranches in the Sierra Madre Mountains and travel eastward across a wide desert, retracing the 300-mile path that their ancestors walked during the creation of the world. All along the way, the Wixárika people stop to pray and make offerings at their sacred sites. They pray that all living beings on this planet will be protected and that their ancient Wixárika culture will stay strong. Other religions build churches, temples, or shrines to mark sacred places, but the Wixárika people honor and protect the natural landscape. To them, the plants and animals themselves are sacred.



Yauxali and his family hold a vigil around Our Grandfather Fire in Wirikuta.
Photo by Juan Negrin

The Wixárika pilgrims' destination is Leunar, the sacred mountain where they believe the sun, "Our Father," was born and rose into the sky for the first time. Leunar is protected as part of the Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve. That's why the Wixárika were very surprised to learn that a Canadian mining company, First Majestic Silver Corporation, plans to dig for silver right there at Leunar, the sacred destination of their pilgrimage.

In their explorations, First Majestic Silver Corporation found veins of silver ore that extend for a total of 12 miles, and the richest veins lie under the surface of the Wirikuta Reserve. If the company is allowed to go ahead with their mine, they will dig deep tunnels or blast huge open pits on Leunar, bring out millions of tons of ore, crush it, and pile it in massive heaps. Then they will spray cyanide on top of it. Cyanide is a very dangerous poison, but mining companies use it to leach the silver out of the ore. In many other mines, cyanide has leaked or spilled into streams and killed all the fish and other living things. The cyanide leaching process also uses huge amounts of water, and water is very scarce in the semi-desert of the Wirikuta Reserve. In just one day a mine uses the amount of water that a family would use in 25 years.

How will poor farmers raise their crops if the mine uses up all the water? How will the mine, with all its dust, noise, blasting, road construction, and toxic chemicals affect the fragile plants and wildlife? How will it affect the health of people who must drink the water and breathe the air? What will happen to Wixárika culture if they can no longer walk the pilgrimage route to teach their children the ancient history of their people?

These are important questions. Most of all, the Wixárika people want to know how the Mexican government could approve a huge mine like this inside their Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve. Mexican laws guarantee the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government should obey them!

YOUTH ACTION

Stop Mining in the Wirikuta Reserve!

Please write a polite letter to the president of Mexico. Tell him why you think the Wirikuta Cultural and Ecological Reserve is important. If you think he shouldn't allow mining inside the reserve, tell him why.

SEND YOUR LETTER TO:

Lic. Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa
Presidente Constitucional
de la República Mexicana
Residencia Oficial de los Pinos,
Casa Miguel Alemán
Col. San Miguel Chapultepec, C.P. | 1850
México D.F., MEXICO

LETTER WRITING TIPS:

Start your letter with this salutation:
Dear Mr. President,

Make sure your letter is polite and respectful.

At the end of your letter, ask the president for a reply.

Include your name, your age, and your address on your letter. You might get a letter back from the president of Mexico!

Postage from the US is 98 cents.

**The Wixárika People say
Pamparius - Thank you!**