

## Cochiti dam changes pueblo way of life

COCHITI PUEBLO, N.M. (AP) — Cochiti Pueblo Gov. Floyd Pecos, Lt. Gov. Pete Trujillo and council member Joseph Henry Suina stood by the edge of the almost-over-flowing Rio Grande on a May morning. The river flows through the heart of Cochiti Pueblo land and several miles west of Interstate 25.

In the 1950s, this was their playground as boys. They would swim in the river, hunt birds and scoop up Rio Grande silvery minnows by the bucketful. "We used to fry them up. They were really good," Pecos recalled, as the river water lapped almost to his shoes.

The men are old enough to remember picking fruit all summer and fall apples, apricots, plums, cherries from pueblo family orchards along the river. "Every family had a plot of land by the river," said Suina. "Life was out there on the farm."

"Everyone helped during harvest," Pecos said. "Everyone shared food. That's what kept the community together."

It all changed in a generation. First the federal government came in and bulldozed the farms, orchards and small homes by the river in the late 1950s. In those days, most of the pueblo people living on the almost 54,000-acre reservation had two homes one in the pueblo and one by the river. The men can't remember why the lands were bulldozed, maybe to make the farms larger.

"That was a big mistake," said Suina, a retired University of New Mexico education professor and former U.S. Marine. "Everyone still remembers where (everyone else's farm) was at the time when it happened." Then came the dam. Pecos looked to the northern

horizon and the dark outline of the five-mile long dam holding back billions of gallons of water in the Cochiti Reservoir.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began building it in the mid-1960s and finished it in 1975. At capacity, the reservoir can hold more than half a million acre-feet of water collected from a 11,695-square-mile drainage area and sources like the Santa Fe River. The dam looms 251 feet above the river bed. It was built to control flooding and sediment, an important tool for managing Rio Grande flows to miles of ditches and hundreds of farmers in the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. Congress later added recreation to the reservoir's purpose.

"The pueblo didn't know (upfront) it was also for recreation," Suina said.

Dust and noise from the dam's construction disturbed the usual quiet around the pueblo for a dozen years. "It really disrupted the peace and quiet of the pueblo," Suina said.

The waters covered a canyon. The sides of the spillway-outlet were anchored to a rock outcropping, destroying it.

"That was one of our sacred sites, not just to Cochiti, but to other pueblos," Suina said. "They blamed Cochiti when it was destroyed. Even today some still blame us."

River banks, once lined with cottonwoods now have a forest of nonnative Russian olives. "The dam created the Russian olive problem," Pecos said. "Seasonal floods on the river use to clean everything out."

The men also say the little silvery minnow wasn't endangered until the dam interrupted the natural ebb and flow of the Rio Grande.

Many bird species that once flocked to the small farms and orchards stopped coming.

Pecos said the grading of the farms and the dam construction along with other factors changed the pueblo's relationship to the land. The arrival of electricity and a tourism industry at about the same time further enticed Cochiti Pueblo people into a new way of life, he said.

The last blow to farming occurred after the dam was finished. Water seeped along its sides constantly and flooded pueblo farmlands downstream. "You could cup your hand along the side and it would fill with water," Suina said.

The farmers couldn't plant when the fields were flooded with three to four feet of water. When water did dry off, salts rose to the top, killing vegetation and poisoning the fields, Trujillo said.

Suina said some of the pueblo elders traveled to Washington, D.C., to draw attention to the seepage.

The pueblo eventually sued the federal government over the dam seepage. The federal government settled with the tribe. In 1994, the tribe used the settlement funds to contract out and build a subsurface drainage system to take the seepage away from the fields.

But the damage was done. For almost a quarter of a century, there was no farming. "We had a whole generation that went without farming," Suina said. "The older men say the young ones don't know how to work hard and work with their hands."

The cultural shift was dramatic.

"It changed the whole relationship not only between

people and the land but the (helping) relationship of people to each other. We became more private," said Suina. "We still get together for ceremonies, but it's different."

The three men remembered that when the Cochiti people were working farms, hunting, fishing and harvesting, most of them were slim. As they shifted to making crafts, eating chips, drinking sodas, watching television and enjoying the other trappings of a modern life, their physical fitness declined.

Meanwhile, the Cochiti Reservoir filled up and became a new destination for anglers, swimmers, boaters and partiers. Visitors traipsed across Cochiti Pueblo land without permission, Pecos said. Every weekend, they left behind trash and beer cans scattered near the reservoir and along the river.

The pueblo and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have worked to repair relations in the last several years. The corps began consulting the pueblo about decisions with the reservoir.

In 2008, Cochiti Pueblo signed a historic agreement with the corps to participate in overall management of the Cochiti Lake area.

The pueblo tried with varying success to grow alfalfa once the seepage was drained from fields, Pecos said.

Still, the governor said he's encouraged by a recent new interest in farming from about a dozen of the pueblo's young men. "They're coming to the council asking for plots of land, they want to grow crops," he said. "We encourage them."

"It's good," Pecos said, watching the river roll by where he used to play as a boy.

## Man accused of threat in artifacts theft case

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Federal prosecutors say a Utah man planned to tie an undercover informant to a tree and beat him with a baseball bat over his involvement in a large-scale investigation into the theft and illegal trafficking of American Indian artifacts.

In a complaint filed Monday, federal officials say 44-year-old Charles Denton Armstrong, of Blanding, told a witness that he was once a patient of James Redd, a

Blanding doctor indicted last month after a two-year sting operation.

Redd committed suicide a day after the indictments were announced.

According to the federal complaint, Armstrong told the witness that he blamed the informant for Redd's death.

Armstrong is charged with retaliating against an informant. He was scheduled to appear in federal court Monday afternoon.

## FBI investigates shooting

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — The FBI and Bureau of Indian Affairs are investigating a shooting on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

FBI Agent Bob Perry says a tribal police officer shot a male of unknown age about 4 p.m. Sunday, in a housing area in the

town of Pine Ridge.

Perry says the person who was shot is being treated at a Rapid City hospital. There's no word on the person's condition.

Perry says he also does not yet have any details on what led to the shooting.

## Advocates discuss use of bald eagle parts

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — Native American advocates and members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe are responding to issues raised when a headless bald eagle used in a religious ceremony was recently found in a Boulder County park.

The Native American Rights Fund, Colorado Commission on Indian Affairs and the tribe have scheduled a news conference at 2 p.m. Monday at the fund's office in Boulder. They say they want to raise awareness about

Native American beliefs.

A bald eagle without a head, talons or feathers was found wrapped in a cloth over Memorial Day weekend. State authorities were concerned the eagle might have been poached and its parts sold on the black market.

They learned that an Indian man who had a federal permit to use parts from dead eagles for religious purposes had performed a ceremony.

## Diabetes concern at American Indian summit

DENVER (AP) — For Henry Sun Eagle, this week's Indian Health Summit in Denver gave him a chance to share ideas and learn from other American Indian health officials from around the nation.

"I'm basically a fitness trainer for Indian diabetics," said Sun Eagle, the special programs coordinator for the Southern Ute Shining Moun-

tain Diabetes program in Ignacio, Colo. "But I learned some new games and other exercises to use without actually making the patients think they are exercising, which is great."

More than 1,500 American Indian health officials and tribal leaders like Sun Eagle attended the three-day conference in Denver that ended Thursday that focused on, among others, obesity and diabetes treatment

and prevention.

The American Diabetes Association reports that nearly 57 million Americans are prediabetic, with another 6 million more Americans who have the disease but don't know it. Type 2 diabetes, which accounts for about 90 to 95 percent of diabetics, is directly linked to obesity.

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