

## My Turn

### Is Questa worth saving?

**JOE A. CISNEROS**

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After reading J.R. Logan's article, "New Mexico lifts pollutant limit for Red River amid efforts to fund restoration," (*Taos News*, Dec. 20-26), I did not know whether to laugh out loud or to vomit in disgust.

Once again Chevron Mine has figured how to successfully massage the EPA, the New Mexico Environmental Agency, Environmental Groups, and some Questa Officials to assure that the Red River in Questa does not recover but rather that it remains "dead." It is bad enough that the Chevron Mine site has been designated a Super Fund Site without having our Environmental officials and the New Mexico Water Board "bending the rule" to allow more devastation! Just another assault on the environment of Questa, not to mention the Wild and Scenic River, the R'o Grande. Why am I not surprised?

It is funny to me how there is never a shortage of "pseudo experts" ever willing to sugar coat this environmental disaster or to point an accusing finger at the erosional scars in the mountains as the culprit for the degradation of the river.

The Questa mine site has already been designated a Super Fund Site. What part of the Super Fund process do these individuals not understand? The investigative process is over, a Record of Decision is already in place!

The logical question to ask is: What do these individuals hope to accomplish? Are they trying to redirect attention from the mine in hopes of fooling the people in believing that the mine has no fault. If enough people believe, then it is easy to applaud Sen. Carlos Cisneros' efforts to secure taxpayer moneys to begin the restoration of the Red River.

I dare to ask, "why should taxpayers shoulder the burden of any part of this massive clean up, they did not contaminate the river?"

With the exception of the Taos County commissioners, the majority of our elected officials seem to have forgotten their constituency in this disaster. Better to keep the blind eye shut than to protect the health of Questa and its people.

Sen. Cisneros, like most other elected officials have always been supporters of the mine, believing that the mine has not and cannot do any wrong. It would be more honorable if officials such as our senator would insist that the cleanup effort begin immediately and that the rules will not be bent to accommodate the mine .

Jim Kuipers, mining engineer and technical advisor for the R3G Group, summed up the reclamation effort by the Chevron Mine by stating, "their reclamation Proposal is like an Edsel without an engine, while some other companies are proposing Cadillacs." This statement reflects Chevron's commitment to the citizens of Questa and the Wild and Scenic River.

As a life-time resident of Questa, I can remember a time when the Red River supported an abundance of life forms throughout the stretch of the river: water insects, fish, frogs, snakes, muskrats, beavers, and other animals who lived on or near the river. Yes, rainstorms did cause washouts and the river would turn yellowish orange in color but when the river cleared, the fish and other life forms were still there.

For Mr. Frey, fisheries biologist, to say that the Red River near the mine or by erosion scars has historically not supported trout is not true.

Today, the Red River is void of life and a grayish film of some toxic aluminum compound coats the bottom of the river. Follow the crud and it ends at the mine site. If what "researchers" say is true about erosional scars dumping aluminum into the river, why does the river not turn grayish blue after rainstorms? People of Questa can remember the river turning bluish gray color every time the mine had a break in its tailings line, and they probably remember that for many years the river was an ugly shade of gray. Do they believe it was erosional scars causing this condition?

Corporate America is alive and well in Questa, motivated to maximize profits for their stockholders and possibly reward corporate CEOs with millions in bonuses. Restoring the Red River, arresting the uncontrolled migration of underground contamination, and cleaning up the environment does not generate profits!

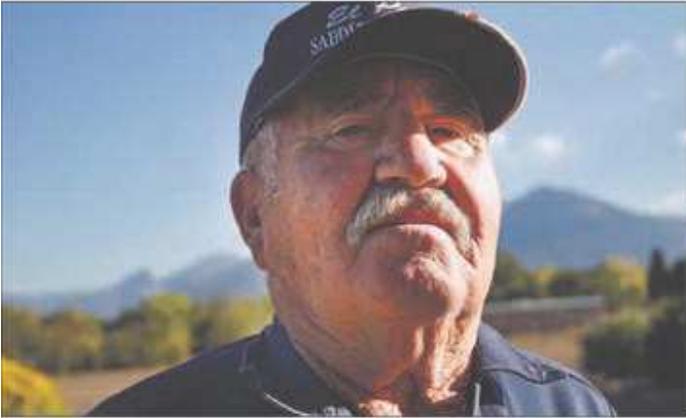
Furthermore, I would conclude that because Questa is comprised of predominantly Hispanics, it is easier for the mining industry to step on such community and conclude that Questa is not worth saving!

Ridiculous? Look at the Environmental disaster Chevron created in Ecuador!

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