

The Department of Environmental Studies at San José State University is pleased to present a public research presentation:

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

12:30 PM – 1:45 PM

<https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/5858275843> pw: ENV@SJSU

## Ms. Ataya Cesspooch

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*University of California, Berkeley, | Unceded Chochenyo Ohlone Lands*



### Contesting endangerments: Indigenous sovereignty, cacti and revitalizing the Ute language

**Abstract:** The Ute Tribe has been leasing land on their Reservation in northeastern Utah for oil and gas development since 1971. Revenue from development has lifted the Tribe out of poverty and positioned energy extraction as the Tribe's primary expression of sovereignty.

However, the federal government maintains regulatory oversight of mineral leasing on tribal lands and implements policies such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the permitting process. The tribal government views this as a direct violation of their sovereignty, establishing "environmental protection" as a contested space. These tensions have culminated around two cacti listed as "threatened" under the ESA and whose habitat coincides with proposed energy infrastructure. UNESCO has categorized the Ute language as "severely endangered" with fewer than 40 living speakers all over the age of 70. The cacti hold no cultural significance to the Tribe, some of whom feel that the federal government prioritizes the lives of the cacti over the lives of Ute people. This presentation engages the productive tension created around these two competing forms of endangerment to explore how Indigenous sovereignty and Ute language revitalization shape the forms of "environmental protection" employed on the Reservation.

*Ms. Cesspooch is a member of the Fort Peck Sioux (Lakota) and Assiniboine Tribes and descendent of the northern Ute Tribe. Prior to starting work on her Ph.D., Ms. Cesspooch worked as an environmental protection specialist on the reservation. She has been taking Ute language classes for the last year.*