

# RED POWER ENERGY

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



**Top:** Power lines are an example of the many ways that energy impacts the land in New Mexico.

**Above:** Larry Pourier shows some of the oil pollution that can be found in the land near New Town, North Dakota.

**Right:** An oil pump near New Town, North Dakota, is another example of the impact of energy in the United States. Photos by Lisa Olken.



## Program Synopsis

**Red Power Energy** is a provocative film from the American Indian perspective that reframes today's controversial energy debate while the fate of the environment hangs in the balance. **Red Power Energy** illustrates the complex realities of Indian reservations grappling with how to balance their natural resources with their traditional beliefs.

From tribes mining coal, drilling oil and fracking natural gas to a coalition of tribes and individuals building sustainable wind farms and small-scale residential solar, the film showcases an engrossing story about America's indigenous population reclaiming their right of self-determination.

## In Their Words

**"I think something many Native people struggle with is how to balance our beliefs with the resources we have available to us on our tribal lands."**

— Pamila Belgarde, Consultant,  
(Turtle Band of Chippewa,  
North Dakota)



Map of the federally recognized tribes in EPA Region 8 of environmental protection.  
<https://www.epa.gov/tribal/region-8-tribal-program>

## Producer's Comment



### Lisa Olken

American Indian reservations in the five-state region of Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota contain significant amounts of energy resources.

These renewable and non-renewable resources can be economically beneficial for the tribes, leading toward greater self-sufficiency for the tribe and greater independence from the Federal government.

I was fascinated about why some tribes embraced coal, oil and natural gas, while other tribes favored only solar and wind power. From the building of new schools, housing and roads to creating trust funds and employment opportunities, Native Nations are asking themselves, "What is going to be the ultimate benefit to the tribe and what is it going to cost us as a people?"

One of the major themes in the film is balance—how to balance a tribe's cultural beliefs with the energy resources on their land. It's a universal question, really, and one that we can all relate to: How do any of us balance our beliefs and traditions with economic growth, between the material needs of today and the potentially negative consequences of tomorrow?

Sovereignty, economic development and the environment are other significant themes, and they resonate with us as filmmakers for this film. As filmmakers, our point of view is decidedly pro-Native. It is not pro-renewables or pro-fossil fuels; that is left to the viewer to decide.

## Discussion Questions

1. "Sovereignty" is a critical issue in Indian Country. Russell Stands Over Bull says, "We not only have to be politically sovereign but economically sovereign." Define, explore and discuss the world's sovereignty. What does it mean to be sovereign? What are the differences between political and economic sovereignty? If Native nations obtain sovereignty, as defined by Russell, how do you imagine the relationship would change between Native nations and the U.S. government?
2. The Northern Cheyenne of Montana continue to refuse to engage in mining coal despite outside pressure from coal mining interests that border three sides of their reservation and have instead embraced ranching and farming as a way to build an economic base. This struggle highlights the internal conflict between the desire for economic sovereignty and the long-held beliefs about caring for the land. Explore your own thoughts and beliefs about this conflict. How does it relate to you? How do you feel about energy, land use and the need to care for the environment?
3. Pam Belgarde says, "I walk a divided spirit in this." She is referring to the conflict many people have, both Native and non-native. We want to respect and care for our environment but also like our creature comforts. Explore ways that we can move toward resolving this seemingly unresolvable conflict. What actions can we take to increase our care of the environment while decreasing our dependence on material goods?
4. South Dakota generates about 26 percent of its energy from the wind. Although solar and wind power both have some environmental impact, explore the ways that shifting toward renewable resources is more aligned with core beliefs in Indian Country—that we must care for the earth and all of her creatures.
5. In the Three Affiliated Tribes segment of the film, one woman says, "Crime follows money." Explore your own beliefs or knowledge about how and why a sudden increase of economic growth in an area would increase crime. What are the factors involved? How does it relate to poverty?



A sign on the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming. Photo by Lisa Olken.





Henry Red Cloud (top right) and his crew of Lakota Solar Enterprises workers install solar panels at KILI Radio, Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Photo by Lisa Olken.

## By the Numbers

1. Indian land comprises 5 percent of the land area of the United States, but contains an estimated 10 percent of all energy resources in the United States. U.S. Dept. of Energy Tribal Energy Program, 2005
2. Indian reservations contain 20 percent of known oil and gas reserves. Shawn E. Regan and Terry L. Anderson, *The Energy Wealth of Indian Nations*, 3 LSU J. of Energy L. & Resources, 2014
3. With less than 5 percent of world population, the U.S. uses a quarter of the world's fossil fuels—coal, oil and natural gas. Worldwatch Institute, 2011
4. 25 percent of known U.S. coal reserves are in Montana. U.S. Energy Information Administration, State Energy Data System, 2015
5. 30 percent of the coal west of the Mississippi is on Tribal lands. U.S. Energy Information Administration, State Energy Data System, 2015
6. 39 percent of America's electricity currently comes from coal. U.S. Energy Information Administration, State Energy Data System, 2015
7. 40 percent of all domestic coal is in the Powder River Basin, which is home to the Crow (Absalooka) and Northern Cheyenne. Wyoming State Geological Survey, 2016
8. Burning coal is the largest single source of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, the leading cause of climate change in the world. United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015
9. There are 567 federally recognized American Indian tribes that reside on 56.2 million acres. U.S. Department of Interior, Indian Affairs

## Suggested Activities

1. Define and compare the differences between 'renewable' and 'nonrenewable' resources. Create a list of both and describe in detail what the potential or actual impact to the environment is from each resource. Then place them in order with the highest impact first and the least impact last.
2. Select a Tribal Nation near you and document its relationship with the land starting with pre-contact with the white man up to the present day. How was the land used? What resources did it have? How large was the land base prior to white contact? How is it now being used? Include not just the economic relationship but how the people connected to the land spiritually, for medicine, for food and other uses.
3. Native American tribes that have chosen to develop their energy resources have done so to create economic well-being for their people. Select one or two of the tribes that have developed their land resources and document how life has changed for the people. Include both positive and negative impacts of an increase in economic viability.
4. Research the process of fracking and explore how the techniques and technology have changed from the first fracking processes used to the current ones used today. Why is fracking used? How have the changes in technology impacted the land? What are the real or potential hazards that can occur as a result of fracking?
5. Many tribes are exploring the possibility of creating wind and solar farms as a means of producing energy. The film mentions several barriers that keep Native American tribes from developing these resources. Create a "Renewable Energy Symposium" or think tank to brainstorm and generate creative ideas for helping tribes to fund, build and operate the 'free' energy of the sun and the wind. First identify the barriers and then think outside the box to find creative solutions.



Larry Pourier and Charles 'Boots' Kennedy outside of Crow Fair, 'tipi capital of the world,' on the Crow Reservation in Montana. Photo by Lisa Olken.

## Resources

### About the film

<http://www.rmpbs.org/redpowerenergy/>

### Websites for more resources

American Indian Science and Engineering Society  
<http://www.aises.org/>

U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs  
<https://www.bia.gov/FAQs/>

U.S. Geological Survey  
<https://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/1809/pdf/pp1809.pdf>

Native American Rights Fund  
<http://www.narf.org/>

First Nation's Development Institute  
<http://www.firstnations.org/>

Lakota Solar Enterprises  
<http://www.lakotasolarenterprises.com/>

Missouri River Resources  
<http://www.missouririverresources.com/>

Sierra Club  
<http://www.sierraclub.org/>

Indigenous Environmental Network  
<http://www.ienearth.org/>

Trees, Water, People Organization  
[http://www.treeswaterpeople.org/about\\_us/about\\_us.html](http://www.treeswaterpeople.org/about_us/about_us.html)

### Articles

#### *Coal-Hungry World Brings Tough Choices for Native Americans*

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/30/northwest-coal-exports\\_n\\_4611021.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/30/northwest-coal-exports_n_4611021.html)

#### *Can Energy Development Empower Native Americans While Powering the United States?*

<http://nativeonline.net/currents/can-energy-development-empower-native-americans-powering-united-states/>

#### *Henry Red Cloud Leads the Renewable-Energy Charge at Pine Ridge*

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/02/07/henry-red-cloud-leads-renewable-energy-charge-pine-ridge-147531>



A sign for Lakota Solar Enterprises at the entrance to Red Cloud Renewable Energy Center, Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Photo by Lisa Olken.

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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/red-power-energy>

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