Situating the Rosemont Mine Proposal Geographically & Historically: Toward a Political Ecology of a Copper Mine

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This presentation...

• Geographical Context—United States, Arizona, Tucson

• Historical Context—Capitalist expansion: advancing frontier

• Governance & the ‘hydro-social’ landscape of the SW U.S.

• Climate change, drought and the Colorado River

• The Rosemont Copper mine project
Geographical Context

Arizona, United States

98th meridian
Historical Context

Territorial expansion of the US
Governance and hydro-social landscapes

Institutional Expansion

Unites States Government (1783)

Department of the Interior (1849)

Fish & Wildlife Service (1940)

National Park Service (1916)

Office of Surface Mining (1951)

Forest Service (1905)

Department of Agriculture (1862)

Department of Water Resources (1980)

Department of Environmental Quality (1986)

Environmental Protection Agency (1970)

Army Corps of Engineers (1775 [1824])

Arizona State (1912)

Pima County (1853)

Department of Mines & Mineral Resources (1939)

Parks and Recreation Department (1947)

Department of Environmental Quality (1989)

White House Council on Environmental Quality (1969)
Allocated waters of the Colorado between upper and lower ‘Basin States’

- 50-50 split
- 7.5 million acre-feet* each

*1 acre x 1 ft. of water
1928 Boulder Canyon Project Act

- Apportioned the 7.5 m.a.f. among the lower basin states
- Approved the construction of Hoover Dam; Imperial Dam; All-American Canal → Imperial Valley
- 1944 Mexican Water Treaty
- 1948 Upper Colorado River Basin Compact
1928 Boulder Canyon Project Act

Governance and hydro-social landscapes
Confirmed Colorado River Compact apportionments as legally binding.

CA could not claim further water through prior appropriation.

...but CA does have priority in case of reduced discharge.
1968 Colorado River Basin Project Act

- Authorises construction of the CENTRAL ARIZONA PROJECT
Governance and hydro-social landscapes

Central Arizona Project
Governance and hydro-social landscapes

Central Arizona Project
Climate change, drought and the Colorado River

Exceptional and widespread crop/pasture losses; shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells creating water emergencies

U.S. Drought Monitor (Oct 14, 2014)
Climate change, drought and the Colorado River

The Colorado Basin

- Rockies snowpack shrunk by 20 per cent since 1980
  (Pederson et al. 2013)
- 25 percent chance the Colorado River will not be able to meet all anticipated demands between 2020 - 2025
  (WRRC 2013)
The Rosemont Copper Project
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• A Political-Ecological Perspective
  – Foregrounding the mine in its geographically and historically specific context
  – Viewed as the capitalist commodification of nature (production of surplus for exchange value)
  – Mapping the actors – Official and unofficial ‘stakeholders’
  – Locating ‘the political’
    • Discourses – “Sustainability”, “Democracy“ and “Participation”
    • Tactics
    • Subjective Experiences
The Rosemont Copper Project

- Bureau of Reclamation (1902)
- Fish & Wildlife Service (1940)
- National Park Service (1916)
- Office of Surface Mining (1951)
- Forest Service (1905)
- Department of the Interior (1849)
- Department of Agriculture (1862)
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (1969)
- Army Corps of Engineers (1775 [1824])
- Arizona State (1912)
- Department of Water Resources (1980)
- Department of Environmental Policy (1986)
- Department of Mines & Mineral Resources (1939)
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ROSEMONT COPPER NEPA Process

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Department of Park and Recreation (1947)

Department of Environmental Quality (1989)

Department of Water Resources (1980)

Department of Environmental Quality (1986)
“Locating the political”

• “The decision-making space [for the NEPA process in the case of Rosemont] is constrained by the mining law of 1872”
  – Allows for patents to be claimed for hard rock mining on public land which must be considered by the responsible federal agency.
  – Means that the question is not “whether” but “how?”
  – But opposition to mining in southern Arizona is not a case of “we want a pretty mine”; it’s “we don’t want a mine at all”.
