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L'École de l'eau

June 19 — July 24, 2021

BAHSAHWAHBEE

I acknowledge the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Nation, protectors of Bahsahwahbee, or Spring Valley, Nevada. This high desert oasis in the Great Basin is home to an isolated stand of juniper tree known as the Swamp Cedars. A mountain tree found at elevations above 7000 feet, the range of juniperous sculpulorum extends throughout the Western United States. The only population of juniper to be found in a valley, the Swamp Cedars are the last remnant of an archaic forest just 5500 feet above sea level.

“A vegetative feature that makes Spring Valley globally unique is the Swamp Cedars. Genetically isolated as the swamp cedars of Spring Valley are, they are well on their way to becoming a new species. As such, they may contain unique alleles (gene forms) that could be used to promote salt tolerance in conifers, or that may code for enzymes that produce novel compounds of medical importance. No other juniper species in the world occurs in situations such as these, so these populations are globally unique.” David Charlet, Ph.D. Effects of Interbasin Water Transport on Ecosystems of Spring Valley, Nevada. 2006

The Cedars have been a gathering place for Goshute, Shoshone and Paiute people for thousands of years, cultivated as a site for antelope hunting, pinon nut harvesting, and autumn celebrations which brought people throughout the region to this unique environment. Bahsahwahbee does not exist by accident. This ecosystem is the result of generations of stewardship by the Goshute people.

The Swamp Cedars were the site of massacres of hundreds of peaceful Goshute men, women, and children by U.S. Army forces in 1861 and 1863, and by an organized militia in 1897.

Our people have gained traditional knowledge of this region over the course of thousands of years. We know that the water in Spring Valley is connected to the water on the Goshute Reservation. It is connected in the same way that blood in one's hand is connected to the blood in one's heart. Spring Valley is especially significant to the Goshute and Western Shoshone People. Swamp Cedars in Spring Valley has always been a sacred tribal gathering area for Indian ceremonies. Swamp Cedars has always provided special medicines and spiritual power in the water. The three massacres that occurred there make it even more holy to our People. Swamp Cedars is our Vatican and our Arlington National Cemetery.

— Rupert Steele, Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Nation

Bahsahwahbee is threatened by a proposal to pump groundwater from the aquifer beneath Spring Valley through a 350-mile pipeline to Las Vegas. If completed, the pipeline would provoke immediate ecosystem collapse, beginning with the Swamp Cedars, a unique cultural and ecological site which would be irreparably destroyed within a generation.

REPLACE VEGAS

Paris, Las Vegas, a plastic flower artificially sustained by water borrowed from a future ruin, is a toxic by-product of the Hoover Dam, that hubristic apex of modernist hydro engineering. In the five years since Standing Rock, water is increasingly the locus of human caused climate change, the medium through which ecological justice is being contested. Water connects us all. Today, the sharp edge of this affirmation is impossible to ignore — we all drink the same water, and the supply is finite. We can save the Swamp Cedars, or casino fountains, not both.

Cedar Spring Water School is a public art project guided by Indigenous ecological knowledge to connect people through the medium of water.

FIRE CIRCLE

There is a fire at the core of all architecture, the cultural aspect of building by which the inhabitants of a structure are responsible to the resources on which they depend, tied to outside. Under the accelerating effects of global heating, fire looms as a threat beyond our control, transforming into a sinister weapon, wildfire. Can we tame flame, our primary human tool? The rocket stove is a low-tech experiment—efficient fire consuming its emissions, burning its own smoke.

WATER WINDOWS

I work in the interior space of a window, that space between the two sheets of glass in a dual pane window, a narrow field of refracted light where energy is instantiated. What's water architecture? Though it is indigenous to everywhere, present in some form wherever life on earth is found, water never stops moving. Simultaneously ubiquitous and invisible, water remains hard to visualize, pure change state. From this isolated outpost, one of the most remote and sparsely populated areas of the continental United States, we can learn to perceive what water has to teach us. *Cedar Spring Water School* is a lens, a way to see the world through water.

Cedar Spring is a pristine source of clean drinking water and a repository of Indigenous ecological practices stretching back to the beginning of time. The Swamp Cedars are said to contain the DNA of the Goshute ancestors buried there, living relatives of the people who have successfully protected this ecosystem through centuries of settler colonial occupation. *Water School* moves, following water as it cycles across vast geographies, linking mountains to oceans and subterranean aquifers to the skies above them. From Albuquerque to Zürich; Los Angeles to White Earth, Minnesota; the Great Lakes to the Salish Sea; Cedar Spring to Paris: *Water School* is a mobile architecture, learning from the fluidity of its medium and the collaborative process of its construction. As we seek to heal the planet that sustains us, we can return to the source, and learn to listen to the water.