



SALLY SMITH'S DRAWING, AT LEFT, WAS CREATED AS AN EARLY MASTHEAD FOR THE "GET A GRIP" NEWSLETTER

CONTINUED FROM SALLY SMITH ON P. 4

Yet while opposition to oversight may have softened in corporate meeting rooms, Sally is troubled by Freeport-McMoRan's influential role in the rewrite of a draft state rule governing open-pit copper mining. Coinciding with the election of conservative Republican governor Susana Martínez, Freeport and its allies are trying to roll back regulations that currently protect New Mexico's precious groundwater from mine-related pollution and direct the industry to restore thousands of acres it has already contaminated. (See COPPER RULE on Pg. 1.)

"Even I was surprised and shocked," Sally declares, "at just how blatant they were in getting the proposed copper rules changed in their favor."

Attorney General Gary King, elected to his office rather than appointed, thinks the groundwater regulations adopted in September by the Water Quality Control Commission violate state water quality law. The rules, proposed by the state's Environment Department in consultation with Freeport-McMoRan, which is already under orders to restore heavily contaminated groundwater, allow copper mines to discharge water that does not meet groundwater standards. (About 90 percent of New Mexico's drinking water is pumped from the ground.) The matter is currently under appeal.

Asked to predict whether the adversarial relationship between mining companies and public-interest entities is improving, Sally is sanguine. "In the short term," she believes, "it's not going to get any better. We need to keep the permitting processes in place. Staff at the state Environment Department are vulnerable...What happens on the personnel level there could really change everything."

Rest assured, Sally is not abandoning the ongoing fight to keep the area's biggest industry accountable. "I don't like to think of myself as being retired from all of this," she says, noting that she is continuing as president of GRIP's board of directors. "I also am available for consultation and communication."

A part of her legacy, Sally believes, is that "people do respect GRIP. People do show up when we ask for their help. But it's still true that not many want to get into these mining issues and a lot more could be done."

In coming months Sally plans to spend more time with her family as well as caregiving, traveling, and doing the landscaping and gardening that has occupied her spare time for many years. "Long ago," she adds, "I decided that I'm not going to do this [type of advocacy] if I'm angry all the time."

Sally points out that she never made a deliberate decision to immerse herself in mine-related work. "I never thought about the pros and cons of doing it," she insists. "I simply felt called. All I did was be persistent."



GRIP PROGRAM ASSOCIATE CLAIRE CATLETT (L.) AND DONNA STEVENS, OUTREACH AND GILA RIVER FESTIVAL COORDINATOR FOR THE GILA CONSERVATION COALITION, WERE HONORED WITH A DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD FROM THE NEW MEXICO OUTDOORS COALITION AT A DEC. 9 CEREMONY IN ALBUQUERQUE. THE AWARD MADE SPECIAL MENTION OF THE "ENDURING IMPACT AND SCOPE" OF THEIR WORK IN COORDINATING THE ANNUAL GILA RIVER FESTIVAL. (JEFF HOWARD PHOTO)

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