

# Beyond Nuclear

working for a world free from nuclear power and nuclear weapons



Current proposals for federal assumption of ownership of highly radioactive nuclear waste at privately-owned consolidated “interim” storage facilities, including proposed legislation and proposals to store nuclear waste in southeastern New Mexico and western Texas, would violate the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA), which forbids the U.S. government from taking title to nuclear waste until a permanent repository is operational.

And proposals to amend the NWPA for the purpose of allowing federal ownership of nuclear fuel during storage would fatally undermine the **bedrock equitable and scientific principles** that underlie the NWPA. Once the federal government takes title to the nuclear waste, the political will needed to site and build a repository will evaporate. Thus, consolidated storage of nuclear waste would be a dead-end detour, resulting in dangerous *de facto* permanent surface storage of nuclear waste at these sites.

**Economic Inequity:** Consolidated storage would shift responsibility and liability for nuclear waste from reactor licensees to the U.S. government, before a repository is licensed. The nuclear industry claims it will pay the costs of operating consolidated storage facilities from court awards it has received for the federal government’s failure to take title to nuclear waste on the schedule set out in the NWPA. But once the federal government takes title to nuclear waste, a range of costs currently borne by reactor licensees will shift to federal taxpayers, including the high costs of transportation and accident liability.

**Intergenerational Inequity and Environmental Injustice:** Consolidated storage sites would impose environmental and public health burdens on future generations, and compound future intergenerational inequity with past and ongoing environmental injustice.

## Consolidated "Interim" Storage of Highly Radioactive Nuclear Waste:

### A Dangerous and Inequitable Dead-End Detour Away from a Repository

**Environmental Justice Case Study: Texas** has large Latinx populations that would be put at risk by both nuclear waste storage and transportation. EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening Tool shows that populations along rail lines that could be used to transport nuclear waste are as much as 94% minority.

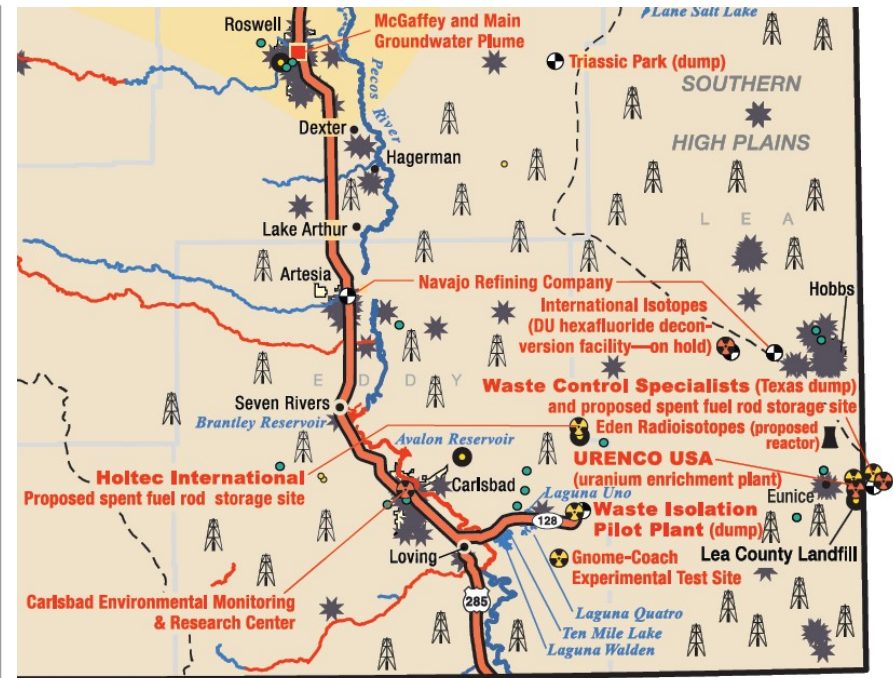
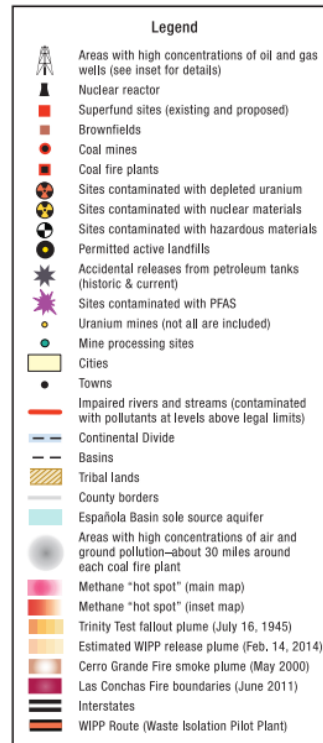
Rail segment	population	% minority	% Hispanic	% who speak Spanish at home	
				Speak English Well	Do not Speak English Well
El Paso to Monahans	100,985	94%	92%	51%	49%
Bexar county	86,262	88%	72%	59%	41%
Bexar County (route 2)	90,644	78%	71%	58%	42%
Houston to San Antonio	114,433	67%	67%	79%	21%
Midland to Eunice	37,415	70%	63%	62%	38%
Harris county	103,509	67%	45%	70%	30%
Beaumont to Houston (southern route)	49,295	72%	42%	89%	11%
Texarkansas to Dallas	92,054	63%	33%	71%	29%
Ft. Worth to Midland	84,583	37%	28%	87%	13%
Tarrant county	74,450	49%	26%	78%	22%
Shreveport to Dallas	97,323	61%	26%	73%	27%
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>930,953</b>				

(Prepared in 2021 by Public Citizen’s Texas office and SEED Coalition using U.S. EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening Tool and the American Community Survey.)

Interim Storage Partners (ISP) has proposed to build a consolidated interim storage facility in Andrews, Texas. This facility jeopardizes the Ogallala Aquifer, on which eight Great Plains States depend for their drinking and irrigation water supply. By ISP’s scheme, urban areas, mostly in the eastern U.S., would dump their radioactive waste on rural western communities near this major water source, and the nuclear industry that has profited from the generation of nuclear electricity will lose any incentive to participate in the development of a system to permanently isolate the waste and to prevent the serious health and environmental problems caused by the generation of nuclear waste.

**Environmental Justice Case Study:** In New Mexico, a state with one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S., the fossil fuel industry, nuclear munitions research and manufacturing, and nuclear weapons testing have caused significant public health and environmental damage over many years. In addition, multiple generations of young Native American men have sickened or died from mining uranium, and radioactive contamination is widespread on former uranium mining lands. New Mexico is also host to the country's sole commercial uranium enrichment facility and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, the U.S.'s repository for transuranic military nuclear waste.

Now a private corporation – Holtec International – is proposing to build a consolidated storage facility big enough to hold up to two times the volume of nuclear waste generated by U.S. reactors since the 1950s. If this facility is built, communities who have already suffered devastating, multi-generational industrial health impacts would be forced to take tens of thousands of tons of the most radioactive material on earth – with little or no hope of ever getting rid of it. To compound the injury, a similar nuclear waste facility is now proposed for Andrews, Texas – just across the state line and less than 40 miles away.



"Water, Air, and Land: A Sacred Trust," map of New Mexico's nuclear, fossil fuel, and other hazardous sites, close-up of southeastern corner of the state (Deborah Reade, Santa Fe, NM, 2021). Map of the entire state of New Mexico available here: <http://www.beyondnuclear.org/centralized-storage/2021/7/29/water-air-and-land-a-sacred-trust.html>

**Political Inequity:** If it agrees to accept ownership of and liability for nuclear waste before a repository is licensed and operational, the federal government would fatally undermine the political mechanism needed for support of a permanent geologic repository. Once it can foist liability for nuclear waste onto the U.S. government (*i.e.*, federal taxpayers), the nuclear industry that has profited from the generation of nuclear electricity will lose any incentive to participate in the development of a system to permanently isolate the waste and to prevent the serious health and environmental problems caused by the generation of nuclear waste.

*Thus, consolidated nuclear waste storage would fatally undermine the goals and principles of the NWSA by permanently stranding host communities with tens of thousands of tons of highly radioactive waste that will cause health and environmental injuries for generations that extend beyond recorded time.*