

Riverside

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Riverside County supervisors say they can't intervene in Colorado River land dispute

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By MARK MUCKENFUSS
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Roger French

This dispute was caused by a non-elected governmental official, the Secretary of the Interior, issuing a 2 page memo in 1969 that extended the boundary of the CRIT reservation into California along a 17-mile sliver of land that just so happened to encompass the homes of 250 families and 6 resorts. Previously, the boundary was riparian (the river) for 93 years. The courts in AZ v. CA on 3 different occasions found the Secretarial Order insufficient to create a new boundary. Knowing that they were going to lose the boundary dispute, CRIT pushed for a settlement of the case in 1999 that deferred the boundary dispute. CRIT has since used sovereign immunity to prevent the courts from finally striking down the Secretarial Order.

An illegal Secretarial Order does not deprive U.S. citizens of their due process rights. Until recently, Riverside County insisted that CRIT obtain a valid court order to either remove property or residents from the disputed area. Now, Riverside County is refusing to provide even the basic protections of property, let alone due process requirements, even though residents pay Riverside County taxes.

Residents have always been willing to pay rent for the land. However, our landlord is the U.S. government who refuses to accept payment. Even CRIT has refused payments on occasion. Instead, CRIT is using strong-arm tactics to force residents to abandon their lease agreements with the U.S. in favor of new CRIT leases that include agreeing to tribal jurisdiction, tribal court, and tribal ordinances present and future.

The failure of the Riverside County Supervisors to force the sheriff to return to the policy of requiring due process is deplorable. Allowing the residents to defend themselves against a hostile foreign sovereign is inexcusable.