

## A Modern Day Fairy Tale



Once upon a time, in a remote county of northeast Texas, a handful of folks heard news that a huge giant called TXU (That's short for Texas Utilities company) was planning to build a coal-fired monster power plant right in their beautiful and quiet little county. Now, this handful of people were country folk, but not ignorant by any means. They knew the consequences this dragon would bring — not only for them but for all living creatures and the soil and the water for miles and miles and miles. For you see, the wind knows no boundaries, and this monster was sure to belch tons of horrible pollutants every year. Pollutants like CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter and mercury. Not to mention that their neighbors in Wyoming would lose more of their mountain tops to supply the coal—more than 120 noisy, dusty train cars, every day, to feed just that one dragon.

Upon further research, the little group learned that the giant was seeking permission (from the powers-that-be in the state) for not just one coal-fired plant but eleven! They also learned of more giants in the state planning even more of these horrible life-sucking dragons. And, when they talked with friends in other states, they learned that other giants were scheming to do the very same thing. To make things worse, they learned that the Texas governor had given instruction for the permitting process to be fast tracked!! This meant they would have only six months to speak out against having this dragon built in their beautiful and quiet little county. Feeling overwhelmed and close to helpless, they agonized over what could possibly be done in only six months! (By law, the usual time for this process is eighteen months.)

Now, many other people in the county heard the rumor of the coming dragon, but either believed the giant's claims of wonderful benefits, or just gave up without trying to fight because they had heard, "It's a done deal." But the heros of this story (and this little handful are, indeed, heros) were not willing to give up without a fight. One among them decided to call a meeting to get organized. Besides the original handful, he invited a few more local people to come. He also asked dragon-fighting experts from Public Citizen and the SEED Coalition to come to the meeting to educate and inspire the group. And, before anyone could say, "Wow!" the group was organized and named "CORE" (Citizens Organizing for Resources and Environment). That night the group decided to become a legal non-profit corporation, to seek party status in the upcoming hearing, and to file for 501(c)3 status so contributions would be tax deductible. One of the handful (Paula) designed the group's official logo.

CORE then decided to hold public meetings to educate the public and to instruct them how to file for individual party status in the upcoming preliminary hearing, and how and where to write their legislators. A speaker's bureau emerged from the group and began to visit city councils and county commissioners to gain their support. (Some of those were open to passing resolutions against the monster's coming, but others chose to believe the giant's spiel that it was, indeed, their "good neighbor" and would bring only benefits to their communities.) Over the next few weeks, the group held meetings and forums with experts on the panel, and word spread in the county and the adjoining county that there just might be a possibility of fending off the giant's monster. Before long CORE had grown to a membership of over 150.

Knowing, however, that they would need good legal council if they hoped to find their way through the maze of the hearings, CORE sought the help of a major environmental dragon slayer who had a great

reputation for defending the underdog. Because he knew how crucial this battle would be, he agreed to do what he could, mostly at his own expense, if CORE would agree to pay him the balance once they could raise the funds.

At the same time, the group's spokespersons made contact with the of Oklahoma's Dept of Environmental Quality and the Choctaw Nation there. Both of these groups, who were very angry that they had not been informed of the monster's impending arrival, sent very strong letters to the Texas judges.

The dragon slayer was very pleased with CORE's strategy, then told them of his own: he would have CORE (and three other groups he would invite) sue the governor of Texas on grounds that he (the gov) had no constitutional authority to put the permitting process on a fast track. The judge agreed and placed an injunction on the fast track, which resulted in four months more time for all the opposition groups in the state to plan their strategies for the contested case hearing!

Meanwhile, two very, very large investment groups were watching all these goings on—the increasing resistance that was coming from citizens and communities, the value of the giant's stock dropping, the likelihood of new global warming legislation and such—and decided to buy out the giant. In the agreement (which you likely have heard, since the news was spread far and wide) was that eight of the planned coal-fired monsters would **not** be built. The very first one taken off the table was, of course, the one in CORE's own county!

All of CORE's members—and some other folks who had been too timid to stand up against the giant — cheered their victory. They did, however, vow to keep on fighting — alongside the other groups in the state — to prevent **any** coal plants being built in Texas. And they vowed to help their neighbor in the next county fight against a polluting asphalt plant seeking a permit, and to fight against the Trans-Texas Corridor (which will affect the entire nation), and the many boondoggle reservoirs (two in their own county), and an unneeded giant power line, and any other threats to their beautiful and quiet home — with hopes they could all live happily ever after.

— The Beginning —