

# Leslie Van Stavern Millar: Freedom to live in a healthy Montana

LESLIE VAN STAVERN MILLAR 11 hrs ago 1



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I moved to Arlee in 1972, shortly after graduating college, and remained in the area due to its strong natural beauty, abundant wildlife and plants, and the wonderful people who live here. Since that time, I have invested wholeheartedly in the local and regional Montana community as an artist and activist. In the mid-1990s I began marching in the Arlee, July 4th parade as “Science Woman”, my performance art persona, recruiting family members and fellow artists to participate as part of the team. Wearing white lab coats, leopard print tights and colorful accessories, we marched promoting the need to protect our planet. Over three decades, the Science Woman parade entry has varied in size, composition and message, and become a local institution.

In 2023, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality approved a permit for a 157-acre gravel pit and asphalt plant despite strong local opposition. The proposed asphalt plant is located in Arlee on the Flathead Indian Reservation just down the road from the Garden of 1000 Buddha’s in the foothills of the Mission Mountains. It is clear that the plant would be an environmental disaster operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week for 25 years; emitting fumes that are a known carcinogen, disrupting wildlife trails and potentially contaminating the trout-rich Jocko River. The Friends of the Jocko, a small, rural non-profit, has energized a committed community and filed a legal suit to challenge the permit, based on the inadequacy of the Department of Environmental Quality’s assessment as well the law under which it was issued.

This prompted me to undertake an Art Action to draw attention to this threat. I assembled 25 marchers for this year’s parade and titled our entry Freedom to Live in a Healthy Montana, reflecting our rights to a clean and healthy environment guaranteed under the Montana Constitution. We twirled batons, drummed, carried banners, and clapped rhythmically.

Our participation in the July 4th parade was a smashing success. We marched by hundreds of our neighbors, distributed lots of flyers, were met with lots of smiling faces and cheers, and were joined by several of our Missoula supporters. To top it off, those who marched had lots of fun. But fun and artistic expression are not by themselves enough. Our aim is to win our suit and stop the asphalt plant. I urge all who are interested in environmental justice to join our cause by visiting [FriendsoftheJocko.com](https://www.friendsofthejocko.com) and providing the support we need to win our case. We hope to march next in the University of Montana homecoming parade.

Leslie Van Stavern Millar wrote this editorial in conjunction with Larry Frankel, who also marched in the parade. Both are residents of Arlee members of the Friends of the Jocko.

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