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For More Information Contact:

Kenneth Clarkson
Communications Director
kenneth@pstrust.org
360-543-5686 x104

Oil Companies Pay $7.4M in Clean Water Act Civil Penalties for Crude Oil Spill on Tribal Land Owned by Sac and Fox Nation

In July 2022, the Osage Pipeline ruptured and leaked nearly 300,000 gallons of crude into Skull Creek in Payne County, Oklahoma. On Jan. 30, the EPA and Department of Justice announced that Holly Energy Partners-Operating L.P. and Osage Pipe Line Company LLC, companies associated with HF Sinclair, agreed to pay the fine and will continue to clean up and remediate the spill site.

BELLINGHAM, Washington [Feb. 19, 2024] – The massive oil spill off the 20-inch diameter Osage pipeline occurred just 50 miles from the city of Tulsa, OK on tribal land. The entirety of the pipeline system runs 135 miles through Oklahoma to HF Sinclair's El Dorado Refinery in Kansas.

In the EPA press release announcing the penalties, the agency noted the spilled crude oil significantly damaged Skull Creek's water quality and harmed the stream's habitat.

In its complaint filed in an Oklahoma federal court, the Justice Department noted that the spill killed multiple different species of wildlife that lived in the Skull Creek ecosystem. The complaint states that "numerous oiled or dead fish and other wildlife were observed both in the creek and the spill area." Animals such as beavers, turtles, snakes, river otters, deer, and others called the riparian habitat home.

It is important to note that Skull Creek is a tributary of the Cimarron River, and according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Cimarron River is a major source of water for the state of Oklahoma. The USGS states that the demand for water resources has caused increasing withdrawals from the Cimarron River alluvial aquifer for a variety of uses, ranging from agricultural to public use. The USGS also notes that the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma is concerned about the sustainability of the water source for future generations of tribal members.

“We are encouraged that the Justice Department is holding the operators of Osage Pipeline accountable for this disastrous spill that was in blatant violation of the Clean Water Act,” Pipeline Safety Trust Executive Director Bill Caram said. “Too many times our pristine natural environments are desecrated by an operator’s failure to keep the product in the pipe.”

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About Pipeline Safety Trust: The Pipeline Safety Trust is a nonprofit public watchdog promoting pipeline safety through education and advocacy by increasing access to information, and by building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government, and industry, that result in safer communities and a healthier environment.