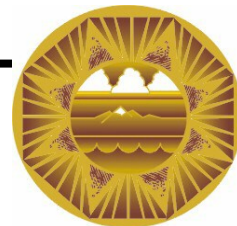


LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION DEMANDED

The LEADer



Second Quarter 2025

LEAD AGENCY PERMIT OUTREACH GETS RESULTS

Ottawa County residents collectively speak out against proposed biogas facility - Kimberly Barker

More than 60 members of the community attended a meeting hosted by the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and Argo Development Partners April 2 at the Miami Civic Center.

The meeting, facilitated by DEQ's Air Quality Division, gave residents a chance to learn more about the draft construction permit for the Argo Development Partners Oklahoma Bioprocessing Project (**Permit No. 2024-0514-C**). Argo Development Partners, an out-of-state-company, aims to construct a facility to convert chicken waste into biogas and organic fertilizer.

DEQ said that it received about 400 public comments regarding the air permit, the biggest response they've seen. A majority opposed the project.

During the town hall, DEQ and Argo offered additional information and allowed for questions and to submit further comments. A court reporter was present.

Construction of the estimated \$60-\$80 million facility would take anywhere from 24 to 27 months to complete. The plant would be located at US Hwy 69 Alternative and S. 592 Rd. in Quapaw, which is in close proximity to the Tar Creek Superfund site, a Quapaw Nation cemetery, an addiction treatment center and an Indian health clinic.

Concerned citizens and tribal members spoke out against the proposed facility that would bring in 164,000 tons of chicken waste annually to Ottawa County. If approved, this would be Argo's first biogas plant that utilizes chicken manure and one of the first of its kind in the United States.

The air permit requests the release of hazardous gasses during operation and emergencies including SO₂ (sulfur dioxide), an environmental pollutant, and H₂S (hydrogen sulfide), a flammable and poisonous gas that smells like rotten eggs.

Many of the attendees, including environmentalists with tribes, registered nurses and a chemical engineer spoke out against the plant citing bad engineering practices and toxic releases, saying the community has endured enough negative health and environmental impacts from companies. Issues with water usage, potential odors and noise, fires, explosions, emergency response and additional risk for pollution were also discussed among the crowd.

Argo has applied for a minor source construction permit, which means a cumulative impact study is not required for the project. Several attendees asked DEQ to consider conducting an environmental impact study and a cumulative impact study in order to give the city a baseline, if future problems were to arise from this facility.

We have learned the permit has been approved, with ODEQ changes to be more protective of the public and the environment.



Environmental Protection Network

EPN, the Environmental Protection Network supplied a professional air expert to assist LEAD Agency with technical issues associated with the Argo Air Permit. **Tom Ripp** was open to working with us on our official comments on the permit. We organized a webinar that many of the local tribal environmental staff members attended, helping us all prepare questions and comments for the public meeting. **Amy Hull**, a former resident also attended the meeting to speak with authority on the permit with questions on the operational controls.

LEAD THANKS YOU BOTH!

Learn about the BF Goodrich permit meeting DEQ held June 11

Go to page 3

Meet the young People who took the time to make a difference



"Get in Good Trouble. Necessary trouble. And redeem the soul of the United States" Congressman John Lewis



Ottawa County loses a legend it never knew

What Don Ackerman did has cost EPA millions of dollars and will cost even more in the decades to come. Those dollars all spent to protect our children from lead poisoning. The lead was found in school yards, parks and residential front and backyards, all being dug up and removed and replaced with clean lead-free soil. Don put this action into motion. We will be forever grateful and will continue to tell this story for the future generations to know, one person can make a difference and Don did it for us.

When Don worked at the Miami Indian Clinic, he discovered one-third of our Indian Children were lead poisoned, reported this and asked federal officials to do something about it. They did investigate and found that all children living in Ottawa County could be at risk from being lead poisoned from the soil in their parks, schoolyards, and in their very own front and back yards.

Since 1995 EPA has been removing soil contaminated with lead. All of Ottawa County is now a Superfund Site. His action triggered this work. He pretty much demonstrated the fact that one person can make a difference. He certainly did.

For the last 30 years the EPA has funded work that was done to protect children, who by now could even have grandchildren they are protecting.

The EPA commitment to protecting the children from lead poisoning has cost over 300 million dollars. That may sound like a lot of money. But nowhere on earth can you BUY a single IQ point or get a brain transplant or other organ replacement for what can be lost by lead poisoning or repair the damage it can cause to every organ in your body. Intervention and elimination of the poison is how you deal with lead poisoning. The only prevention is removing it permanently so it doesn't hide and get your grandchildren even if it skipped you somehow.

But you have to admit, the EPA and now DEQ are dug in on moving contaminated yard soil. The big work on what they call high access areas happened early in the northern towns, what they called the 5 mining towns, where daycares, schoolyards, parks were dug up and lead contaminated soil removed. That early work started in 1995, thirty years ago. The 30-year anniversary this year!

Imagine all those IQ points that have been saved. There ought to be a smart way to celebrate. I believe we ought to name it the Don Ackerman Celebration of Lives Made Better in Ottawa County, OK.

For the decades before we all understood mine tailings (chat) could harm our children, there were pickup trucks and dump trucks bringing that stuff in to fill low areas in your yards, to fill out your driveways, to cover every county DIRT road and every alley throughout the county. Dads proudly brought it in to put under the swing sets in the backyard and to even fill sandboxes. The "sins of our fathers" unintentionally did that, not knowing the stuff was loaded with poison.

The voluntary cleanup of lead from residential properties continues to this day. It is FREE to have your soil tested, and if you need it to be replaced it is done FREE of charge and new sod replaced. If you had your yard done years ago, you can ask for it to be re-sampled for peace-of-mind. Call DEQ Hotline 800-522-0206.

Don Ackerman received one of the first Mike Synar Environmental Excellence Awards presented in 1998. We knew then what he did was important. One of the other recipients that year was Gary Moore, the Project Manager who kicked-started the first Emergency Actions by EPA. — **Your Tar Creekkeeper, Rebecca Jim**

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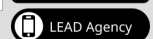
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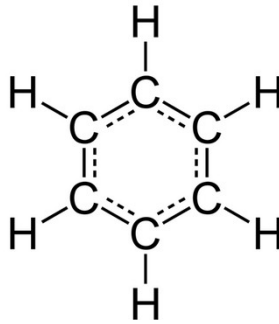
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“YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO BE SILENCED.” — JAMES DEVITA

BFGoodrich**BENZENE**

Abby Williams was a Senior at the University of Oklahoma in the Department of Geography and Environmental sustainability when she chose to do her capstone project around the transformation of brownfields. She focused on the BF Goodrich plant in Miami, OK. She visited the site and then researched how the current cleanup is being done by Michelin North America, Inc., the parent company and current responsible party. Through her efforts we learned more about the “sparging” process, and were able to share this information with the community. The BF Goodrich site contains volatile organic compounds and

hazardous air pollutants, such as benzene, hexane, and toluene, which are known to cause cancer or other health issues with prolonged exposure. The cleanup is being led by Geosyntec Consultants.

A group of young people canvassed the neighborhood most adjacent to the BF Goodrich property to inform residents of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) public meeting that would be held on June 11 at the Miami Public Library. They knocked on every door, engaging with the residents, leaving informational cards when no one answered the doors.

The library meeting room was overflowing with concerned residents who wished to hear more about the cleanup efforts at the BF Goodrich site. Three television news stations, KOAM and KODE from Joplin and KTUL from Tulsa, attended the meeting and posted meeting coverage on their websites. Several questions from residents and tribes were left unanswered, but ODEQ suggested there will be another meeting about the BF Goodrich site in the coming months where people can again ask questions about the benzene plume and the groundwater contamination. (Kimberly Barker)

Residents received no real answers, and learned little from the meeting and left disappointed and worried about the health and environmental impacts they face from living near the sight.



College Student volunteers: Ethan McMahan, Luke Lupton, both at OU, Carter Hood, OSU and Sarah LaForce NSU seated with Rebecca Jim recording their first podcast with reflections on their effort of civic engagement.

AND THERE IS EVEN A HAPPINESS THAT MAKES THE HEART AFRAID. Thomas Hood

GRETCHEN SASSENATH KNOWS SOILS — KIMBERLY BARKER

“Soil Health” has become an emerging topic as people recognize the importance of healthy soils to support society. Our understanding of what makes soils “healthy” is changing as we gain more knowledge about the various aspects that contribute to soil functioning and all the things that soils do. Most people think of soil as a physical medium that holds up buildings, or roads, or provides support for plants to grow. But soils are much more complex than just their physical characteristics. We have identified a lot of the chemical aspects of soil, such as the nutrient levels. Research is identifying the biological complexities of soils. Our understanding of the complex relationships between these physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of soils is emerging and growing as we examine soils in new ways.

One of many challenges of studying soils is that soils have been greatly modified by man. Paving a road creates a very different soil than what was originally there, including leveling the land, adding rock substructure, and sealing the roadway to prevent infiltration of water and exchange of air. Plowing a field may look more “natural” than a hardened surface such as a road or building, but the process of plowing a field greatly disturbs the soil, including changing the physical, chemical, and biological activities in the soil. Pristine, untouched areas of land are very rare, making it difficult to understand the “natural” state of soils, prior to development of societal feedlots (cities and towns) (or “taming the wilderness”).

This research was undertaken to explore differences in soils that are under different land use. We are measuring soils from areas of fields that have a prior history of long-term hay-meadow, a natural shrub area, and a crop field that was recently converted to grassland. Historically, the land in this area was a tall grass prairie. Shrubs were common along waterways or in low-lying areas, with a transition to oak-hickory forests in the hills and mountains to the east. Tall-grass prairie is a particularly rich ecoregion. The native prairie plants create a dense, diverse root-soil biome to a depth of 12 feet or greater. This ecological diversity impacts nutrient and water cycling in the prairie region. To better understand how land use impacts the ecological diversity: the biological, chemical, and physical parameters are being measured from these different areas of the fields. Six paired sites have been identified. Soil is collected from each site at different times, and measured for physical characteristics texture (sand, silt and clay composition), water aggregate (stability), chemistry (nutrients and water), and biological activity (microbial activity). These will be examined over time to delineate differences in soil health characteristics. Our aim is to better understand the interactions between the soil characteristics, plant biome, and ecosystem to rebuild and repair the ecosystem, and improve the nutrient and water cycling.

We’ve lost the native tallgrass prairies that once filled the region. Hopefully, by better understanding the complex, dynamic interactions within the soil and plant ecosystem, we can restore some of the functionality to our modern land.



LEAD’s communications director and journalist, Kimberly Barker, has been working on a research project with Gretchen Sassenrath, a crop production agronomist and emeritus professor of Agronomy at Kansas State University. The project will highlight the importance of soil health in an area posed with environmental challenges and the connection healthy soil has to water, climate, weather and more.

The goal of the project is to produce a series of stories about the changing landscape in the Heartland, the environmental challenges that follow with the loss of native prairie habitats in Southeast Kansas and what steps the public can take to serve as better environmental stewards. Once the stories are completed, it will be shared with the media and the public to raise more awareness.



LEAD TO ATTEND DEEP MAPPING INSTITUTE IN JUNE –MARTIN LIVELY

NEH Community Deep Mapping Institute

powered by 

Is the past really dead? What if you could see it in the present, hear its stories, see the old buildings while standing by an empty lot in the hot sun? What if, standing by this lot, you could add to this record your grandmother's story about the billiard hall, or grocer, or home, that used to stand there, or a story about your grandfather who worked in the mine beneath your feet? Deep maps are online maps doing this – and more.

LEAD Agency and the University of Oklahoma were accepted as fellows to the NEH's Deep Mapping Institute. During 2025 we are learning to make a deep map of Reunion Park on Main Street in Picher. Situated above the Netta East mine and formerly Picher's downtown district, the area was condemned in 1950 because of subsidence risks. After being fenced for 47 years, it became a park in 1997 – until the subsidence risk was remembered and the park was closed. LEAD and OU are working on a map bringing the site back to life with historic maps, photographs, mine maps, and the stories of the people who lived, worked, and played here.

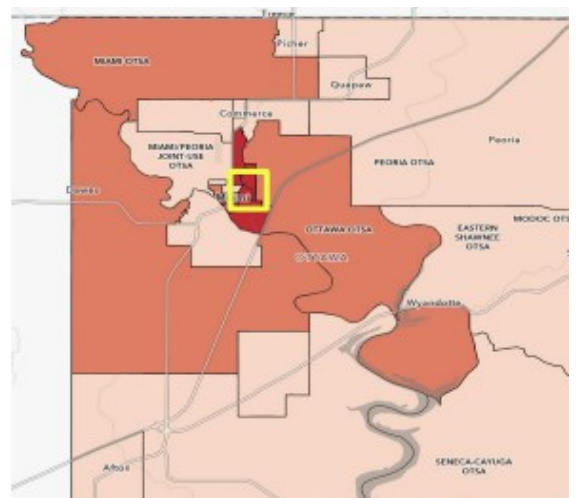
If you have photos or stories, please get in touch!

From July 9 -16, Martin Lively and Laurel Smith of OU will attend the in-person training in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. Hosted by Michigan Technological University and Wayne State University, the Institute will teach a wide range of technical and professional skills that are needed to develop a deep map.

Resilience Assessment for Communities in Ottawa County, Oklahoma



This project, funded by the Climate Smart Communities Initiative (CSCI), aims to enhance resilience in Ottawa County, OK by equipping local partners with tools and strategies to address critical hazards—extreme heat, flooding, and toxic pollution - while supporting efforts to secure necessary funding. In collaboration with the L.E.A.D Agency, Fernleaf focuses on mitigating climate and non-climate stressors that threaten community health, safety, and quality of life, particularly for vulnerable populations. LEAD has reached out to tribes, county and towns in Ottawa County to take part in this process and then be able to use the data, images and information for future planning to deal with climate and heat in the future. We are learning together and seeing our county in new ways as our vulnerabilities become more obvious in the map views that are being displayed to us.



**I BELIEVE THAT WE ARE LOST HERE IN AMERICA,
BUT I BELIEVE WE SHALL BE FOUND.** Thomas Wolfe

ART IN THE PARK – MIAMI ARTS AND HUMANITIES SPONSORED EVENT

In early June, we hosted *Art in the Park* with a musical performance from indie-folk harpist [Moriah Bailey Stephenson](#) and her band as part of their June tour. With our Rural Films Inflatable movie screen, we showed a series of short documentaries.

Aaron Gibson, whose film *Take Care, Tar Creek* had just premiered in Paris, France joined us to screen his film and spoke afterwards about the experience and his next project.



PROTESTS ARE FREE SPEECH – LEAD PROUDLY SPOKE OUT



LEAD's Don't Flood Miami Rally was great practice for community members to see us standing up and speaking out about flooding. Other Rally days found us joined by people we had never met, all learning to stand FOR something and also standing AGAINST practices and policies that can harm people or the environment.



WE HAVEN'T THE TIME TO TAKE OUR TIME. Eugene Ionesco

SCIPP OU SUMMER INTERN ETHAN MCMAHAN – METEOROLOGY MAJOR

SCIPP - Southern Climate Impacts Planning Program, a NOAA Climate Adaptation Partnerships (CAP) paired LEAD Agency with an undergraduate student for a 10 week paid summer internship. Ethan McMahan who will be a junior Meteorology major this fall, began at the end of May and will continue with LEAD until the end of July. Once here, he knew exactly what his project would be. He took on the 2007 flood we experienced. His task, to figure out why a 2 inch rain event could end up with such destructive impacts to our community. Each day took him deep into understanding the climate, the rain event and the soil saturation at that time from previous rain events prior to the flood.



"Coming to Miami I was unsure of what to expect. I had never heard of the town or any of its problems before so I was basically going in blind. Rebecca and Martin welcomed me with open arms and let me have free reign of what I would be doing. My first couple of weeks I spent trying to wrap my head around all of the issues in Ottawa County as well as just trying to remember a bunch of different people I had met. Once I had the bases covered I began to use my meteorology background to research past floods in Ottawa County as well as help Rebecca with the community garden."

GSU ANGELA MONTESANTI PORTER

STUDENT CONSULTANT Angela is a third year Doctor of Public Health student at Georgia State University. As part of the Community-Based Participatory Research course this summer, she was assigned as our organization's Student Consultant. She will be assisting in data collection, conducting academic literature searches and/or reviews, and health promotion/ communications-related activities.



SUMMER INTERN – NAJIYAH WILLIAMSON

Najiyah is a Leidos intern with CDC Foundation and joined LEAD remotely beginning June 2. She is currently seeking a Masters of Public Health in Environmental Health and Epidemiology at Emory University. She is creating a StoryMap for LEAD Agency. She attends our weekly staff meetings as her schedule allows. She meets with LEAD Agency and her CDC Foundation supervisor via Zoom, and with additional meetings with Gina Manders by Zoom or phone to discuss her progress. Najiyah is skilled at doing research, working with imagery software and GIS mapping, and rarely needs help. Gina Manders has taken a great interest in serving as a guide through the StoryMap project and has been able to provide datasets/map files. She will complete her project later this summer.

Youths are our arrows to the future. Ifeanyi Enoch Onuoha

LEAD RECEIVED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



Skeo staff members Eric Marsh, Karmen King, Sabrina Foster with Rebecca Jim and Martin Lively

TASC

Technical Assistance Services for Communities

LEAD Agency requested technical assistance from Region 6 EPA's TASC program to help our staff members better understand the techniques used throughout the country to deal with acid mine water discharges occurring at "mega" superfund sites. The TASC program provides services through a national EPA contract. Under the contract, a contractor (SKEO) provides scientists, engineers and other professionals to review and explain information to communities across the United States and U.S. territories. Over the years, LEAD has received additional assistance to better understand complex issues and to provide educational materials that can be shared with our community members. Skeo has served as a guide to help us maneuver the complicated ways of both the superfund regulations and the way regional offices operate.



LEAD participated in EPA's Annual Tar Creek Open House, held again this April at the Miami Civic Center. EPA and ODEQ were giving information out about the yard soil remediation efforts ongoing in Ottawa County. EPA, ODEQ and the Indian Health Service were also encouraging residents to have their drinking water wells tested for metals. The Ottawa County Health Department had nurses available to do quick blood lead checks for children. Many of the area tribal environmental departments were tabling, but the Peoria's mussel display gathered the most interest from everyone that evening. Region 6 EPA official connected us to citizens 100 miles away who are facing the start up of a superfund site in their community. The evening brought out community members, making it a success!



QUAPAW NATION ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP



The Quapaw Nation Environmental Department hosted a Charrette beginning at the Downstream Casino featuring the US Army Corps of Engineers focused on Ecosystem Restoration. Day one was designed to bring the group into consensus on a project that could restore use to a part of the Quapaw Nation Reservation that had been harmed over the generations by mining and other environmental impacts and deciding where and what that project might do. The group decision was to focus on the heart of the nation, where the drums beat during PowWow season, the Beaver Springs Park. US Army Corps has funding to take on restoring use of Beaver Creek. All around the room, we dreamed together what restoration and re-use of the Beaver Creek watershed might be. Day two was all about the visions community members had for what uses this reclaimed watershed could have. Blank pages and colored pencils and markers were met with blank stares, until each attending began to dream their visions to the pages. Many of LEAD's staff participated in one or both days.

PEOPLE PROTECT WHAT THEY LOVE — Jacques Cousteau

LEAD AGENCY OUTREACH TO NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

LEAD's partnerships with both the CDC Foundation and Anthropocene Alliance have helped amplify our efforts with non-profit organizations in Oklahoma that we have had long standing ties and to also to create and build relationships anew. These efforts will appear to be similar and overlapping at times, with the goal always in mind of growing the environmental movement in the state and giving us all a louder voice when needed.



Regional Resilience Collective (RRC)

With **Gina Manders** and **Rebecca Jim's** continued work with the **Regional Resilience Collective (RRC)**, the group of nonprofit organizations is gradually growing in numbers. The purpose of our RRC is to support and coordinate the work of nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) in our region by connecting environmental community and Indigenous leaders to scientific, technical, legal, policy and communications support, and provide grant readiness and grant-writing support. We are partnering with area CBOs across northeastern and central Oklahoma to establish strong multicomunity partnerships working on resiliency and post-climate disaster programs. Our collective members are working to leverage cross-sector support, to develop and implement climate resiliency plans, and utilize innovative climate adaptation approaches to reach frontline communities in Oklahoma. LEAD Agency's organizers are offering peer mentorship, partnership and subject matter expertise to RRC organizations to provide additional capacity support in the areas of community engagement, collaboration, planning and funds when available.

The CDC Foundation has funded 16 organizations from the south and the mid-west to find unique ways to reach others to help meet environmental needs.



Oklahoma Environmental Collective

Anthropocene Alliance (A2) uses a State Organizing Committee (SOC) model to deepen relationships, build statewide power, and support frontline communities across the country. Each SOC is made up of local leaders, organizers, and member groups who collaborate to strengthen grassroots capacity, amplify local struggles, and build coordinated campaigns around shared priorities. Rather than a top-down approach, SOC's are community-led—frontline groups set the agenda based on the threats they face, from toxic developments to flooding, pollution, and climate-driven disasters.

Naomi Andrews and **Lucas Freeman** are heading up our SOC team working with A2 and LEAD Agency! Alliance (A2) plans to wake up the South to the environmental justice issues each state faces. A2 believes we are stronger together when more people in each state are trained in community organizing for the right to a cleaner and safer future.

Oklahoma non-profit organizations protecting the environment:

Tulsa Area Arkansas River Alliance, Kiamichi River Legacy Advocacy, Carrie Dickerson Foundation and STIR Save the Illinois River Spring Creek Coalition and LEAD Agency, Inc.

We hope to form alliances with non-profits in the state who value the environment Others living in polluted areas, others who want to protect your watersheds and your environment and have not organized yet: Let us help you organize!

We are stronger together!

I'M MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANY MORE. Paddy Chayevsky

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