

# LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION DEMANDED

# The LEADer



First Quarter 2025

I call on every Oklahoman to engage in the process of transparent governance. Request public records. Attend open meetings. Hold your elected officials, including me, accountable. Your actions aren't just your rights; they are fundamental to a functional government.

[Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond](#) [#SunshineWeek](#)

## POULTRY WASTE BIODIGESTER FACES COMMUNITY CONCERNS



An Air Permit was submitted to DEQ 2 days before Christmas '24. The notice almost got past us, but we understood the serious additional threat the poultry waste biodigester might be to the already laden air quality many residents in Ottawa County have. LEAD invited a representative from Argo to speak with us and take questions. LEAD then organized a social media campaign using all the talents our staff have to get press releases out for media coverage and to reach the public who will be most at risk, especially tribal governments and

their tribal citizens, and especially to reach the closest neighbors to the proposed site. Hundreds of comments were submitted to DEQ. Hundreds then filled the Miami Civic Center for MAEDS' open meeting held by Argo and the landowner to discuss the project and answer additional questions from the public.

The DEQ responded to the comments which triggered a DEQ sponsored public meeting where public comments were captured by a court recorder. We wait action from DEQ on the permit.

**WE HAVEN'T THE TIME TO TAKE OUR TIME.**

Eugene Ionesco



## REMEMBERING MOMENTS LONGING FOR BERRIES

Gary Lawley. 20 years ago, Earl Hatley and Gary Lawley encountered a bear in Alaska. They were so close and mesmerized by the actions and the clarity and opportunity they were sharing. The bear had discovered, not them, but an abundance of ripe berries and was consuming them as they watched.

That moment has stayed with them. Earl so much so that he has had the image beaded by one of the most renowned traditional beadwork artists in North America on a traveling bag he will carry with him daily. Gary also still recounts those moments, re-experiences the awe, they both felt decades ago.

Shortly after LEAD gained our IRS status, we were able to apply for the EPA's Technical Assistance Grant. Once we received it, we advertised for technical advisor and Gary's application rose to the top, as they say.

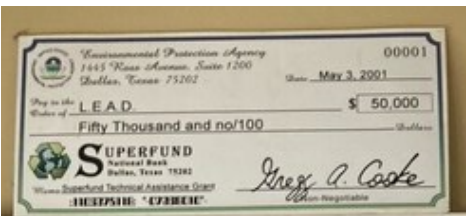
His task was to read all of the EPA generated documents that were on record for the Tar Creek Superfund Site, distill them so that any of us could understand what EPA was saying. About every two months, we would receive another segment of what his final product would be: A condensed and translated version for us. Copies of his report have been and should still be available in the *Tar Creek Repository* at the Miami Public Library. *The Repository* in the library has changed places over the decades, but the EPA documents are required to be available to the public for review.

Last week, Gary Lawley, his wife and friends came to our LEAD Agency office to visit. I put a copy of his report out in front of him and had him autograph it! And we stood beneath the enlarged EPA check for the photo to include for our records! Nearing sunset that day, we returned to see the mine water discharge he had seen twenty years earlier. Thanks to Nick Shepherd's research we have learned it discharges one and a half million

gallons a day out of the mines and rushing to enter Tar Creek unrestrained, still unfiltered. Looking around, it was easy for him to see the other streams of tainted water also entering and the banks still made of chat. I remember his standing in the Miami Civic Center and clearly asking for the **PLAN** that Tar Creek and this site requires. All these years later, we are still waiting for it, for the cleanup you all deserve. The environment waits. The water waits, and those two old men now, Earl Hatley and Gary Lawley who have seen the powerful bear, stopped in her tracks to delight in ripe berries can hope like I do that the PLAN will be developed and all the work that has been done and what will happen in the years to come will bring for all of us the wild berries all along Tar Creek that you and all the living creatures can stop to devour without disturbance, and without fear of the toxic burden those berries would have now.

Gary stood in our office under the enlarged check LEAD had received for that position, and over his shoulder is the painting I purchased from Jerold Graham, the one of Caesar Chavez, leaders standing for environmental justice, demanding it for the future.

~ *Your Tar Creekkeeper, Rebecca Jim*



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Grand Riverkeeper - Martin Lively

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



## OKLAHOMA UNIVERSITY INTERN LUKE LUPTON



Luke Lupton and LEAD Agency actually met during the *Research as Relationship Symposium* held at OU last winter. Luke has since been assigned several tasks in our behalf. One is reading through the Mike Synar Collection that is housed at OU. Mike Synar inspired much of the work LEAD Agency has been doing all these many decades by his passion and hope for a better understanding of the issues here. Another "Luke" assignment has been to proof-read the transcripts of many of the oral history recordings already collected through the Air, Water and Work Stories Project we are working with OU. We can add our thanks to Laurel Smith for adding Luke to the team. Luke learned even more about our issues during a cold Toxic Tour taken this winter.



*Youths are our arrows  
to the future.*

Ifeanyi Enoch Onuoha



## GRINNELL SENDS EXTERN

**Mariposa Condrón**, a second-year Anthropology major at Grinnell College in Iowa, completed a four-day externship with LEAD Agency in March.

Grinnell offers the externship as a job shadowing experience for students by pairing them with alumni working in a possible career field (here Grand Riverkeeper, Martin Lively).

Mariposa began with a crash course about poultry digesters and community activism, helping LEAD prepare messaging and handouts for MAEDS' public forum about the proposed Argo facility.

Mariposa also met with representatives of the Tar Creek Apprenticeship Program, Quapaw Nation Food Sovereignty Program, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, and Sierra Club and spent an evening with student clinicians from the Vermont Law School.

We believe we will see Mariposa again and hope to be part of her academic research as she nears thesis years.



*Mariposa Condrón during her Externship at LEAD*

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

## WATER AND LAW IN THE WATER



*Rachel Abbshire, Kerri Millstain and Todd Howland, their Instructor enjoyed time in the water with our Waterkeepers.*

Two of the Vermont Law School's clinics have "adopted" LEAD Agency and their students are following our issues, semester after semester, handing them off to the next teams of students.

This relationship has changed LEAD's standing in the community with issues that would require the intensive law research we do not have capacity to do.

Vermont Law School's Environmental Justice Clinic represents and partners with LEAD Agency to help advocate for solutions to the broad range of environmental and social injustices caused by generations of pollution and neglect. Their assistance ranges from federal agency engagement to FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests to strategic planning and also exploring possible litigation.

## Be Friends to the Tar Creekkeeper & Grand Riverkeeper

Your help is urgently needed. LEAD's Waterkeeper programs operate with assistance and contributions from concerned citizens such as yourself. Please show your support for environmental health and conservation within our watersheds by making a donation today. LEAD Agency is a 501 c 3 non-profit organization. Donations will be tax deductible. New/Used Life Jackets; Paddles; Kayaks or Canoes help us get people on the water.



**PEOPLE PROTECT WHAT THEY LOVE** — Jacques Cousteau





## LOSING OUR FRIEND JILL MICKA

Jill Micka was a friend to many. When looking through decades of pictures, she is never alone, always with friends, always smiling, with joy and mischief evident.

Jill was a LEAD Agency member, a VISTA for us for 3 years and a board member and always dedicated to our work and efforts at environmental justice. She was our best ever Pendleton Blanket raffle ticket salesperson. While she suffered with Kidney failure, she never wavered in telling the media her belief that this place made her sick and that was wrong.

*Jill always had her "Instant Birthday Party in a Match Box" with her. She would pull it out and light the candle to celebrate a forgotten birthday, sing, blow that candle out and put it back for the next time!*



## ANTHROPOCENE ALLIANCE SENDS MAGNUM PHOTOGRAPHER

A photographic project showing the harm that mining can do to communities began at Tar Creek with additional parts of the project to be completed later this year, when the photographer goes to the Black Hills of South Dakota and then to the West to discover what the new rare earth minerals and resurgence of mining for uranium can be doing to communities. This project was designed by the founders of Anthropocene Alliance with the hope the images will cause viewers to question the risk and loss communities face in the rush to mine. They contracted with one of the finest photographers in the nation, recognized as a member of the elite MAGNUM Photos. This professional photographer gained the confidence of people throughout our community and he captured images that will live into the future. He will host a viewing of the photographs after the series has been completed.

He photographed many people and places here in the Tar Creek Superfund site, and found time to be with Jill Micka for her last visit with her husband before she passed away. A visit that truly brought her great joy.

## MATT BLACK

**Matt Black** (born 1970) is an American documentary photographer whose work has focused on issues of poverty, migration, and the environment. He is a full member of [Magnum Photos](https://www.magnumphotos.com/).



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

**CDC FOUNDATION HUB** Gina Manders is the Community Organizer and GIS Professional who is making a real impact on the community organizations that are joining what both the CDC Foundation and the Anthropocene Alliance are calling our “HUB”. The groups that are joining the HUB are “old friends” but also with many new organizations that have been interested in joining. LEAD will serve as a link to more services, grants and technical assistance and help our HUB members grow their organizations. The next step will take us into another phase of growth and strength in building a wider coalition of non-profit groups and gathering steam as we empower them to work together in unison on issues that bind us in solidarity. We will tell you more about that in the next issue of THE LEADER! We have begun with the Tulsa Area Arkansas River Advocates and the Spring Creek Coalition.



*The Oklahoma Water Resource Board Water Forum was held in Tulsa with water advocates attending who have serious concerns about their watersheds. Kenneth Roberts, Bob Jackman, Rebecca Jim, Kelsey Royce and Martin Lively*

## MOVIE GOES TO ARGENTINA

**AARON GIBSON** recently received news from the World Water Film Festival that *Take Care, Tar Creek* will be one of their selections for an exclusive film bloc as a festival in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He has to come up with a Spanish version and will ask a friend to take my role, and be the voice for Tar Creek in his Super 8 Movie. The words and messaging will be the same. But Tar Creek will leave this country and warn other countries of the harm industrial corporate mining can cause.



## LEAD'S NICK CALCAGNO ART AWARD

**Ron Seat** recently was presented LEAD's Nick Calcagno Art Award. It was at that time he shared how he and Nick had become friends through the roles they had as local art instructors and the scarcity of others in the field. Nick, while teaching at NEO College would host this small group for special creative sessions, sometimes with live models for the group to practice their own skills at sketching, drawing and painting. The award had special meaning to Ron, as he had such a great friendship with its namesake.

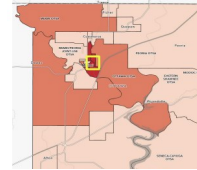
**I'M MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANY MORE.** Paddy Chayevsky



## 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 have learned flooding in much of Ottawa County is Dam-Caused. So though we work on building resilience, some of our work overlaps with our continued efforts to help the citizens and the City of Miami and the tribes effected be protected through our partnership with the Vermont Law School..

**We continue to investigate another risk citizens have: contaminated indoor air in homes with ductwork beneath a slab floor surrounded by chat, which can lead to HVAC systems blowing polluted dust. This construction method was used for decades. LEAD has advocated to EPA to remedy this problem.**

We are working with Thriving Earth Exchange on a household sampling protocol for homes with this issue.

Our next efforts will be conducting Flood Surveys to the outlying parts of Ottawa County in and near Wyandotte within the tribal boundaries of the Wyandotte Nation.

We want to fill out the gaps to better understand the risks Ottawa County Residents face.



Todd Howland with Ellie Elliott, Rachel Abshire and Kerri Millstein and with Phil Trussler below in his business office



*The field experience the Vermont Law Students had while in Ottawa County exposed them to the issues we face, the fear of flooding and the real fear of being slowly poisoned in private residences over decades by using the HVAC system that had been installed by the original builders.*

**The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness  
and all their powers as a state depend.** Benjamin Disraeli

**LEAP INTO SPRING WITH US!  
AND THEN INTO SUMMER!**

**COMING SOON!**

# LEAD SUMMER CAMP 2025

**SPACE IS LIMITED!**



## Camp will include:

- Fly a Drone
- Photography & Art
- Music & Songwriting
- Outdoor Exploration
- Environmental Science & History
- Arts, crafts, and more!

**REGISTRATION**  
**GRADES 6-12**  
**JUNE 17-19**  
**DONATION-BASED**  
No child will be turned away due to lack of funds.



[www.leadagency.org/camp](http://www.leadagency.org/camp)

LEAD SUMMER CAMP this year will offer experiences we believe that will inspire youth to better understand their environment and give them opportunities to find ways to change or challenge authorities to make change possible.

Seeing issues first hand, learning facts and finding ways to make their world better are camp goals.

Their camp experience will end by celebrating what they learn and sharing their findings.

Campers will become some of our youngest and strongest advocates for the environment they will be inheriting.

## SAVE THE DATE

**LEAD AGENCY'S 27TH ANNUAL  
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL**

# TAR CREEK

**CONFERENCE**

**OCTOBER 7, 8, 9, 2025**

**TAR CREEK OPEN**

**DISC GOLF TOURAMENT OCT 4**

*info & registration [www.leadagency.org](http://www.leadagency.org)*

**WED 3-5  
APRIL 23**

**LEAD AGENCY  
EARTH DAY CLEAN UP**

**MEET YOU AT  
TAR CREEK**

**GATHER NEAR ROCKDALE BRIDGE BEHIND NEO**



**DONATIONS  
WELCOME**



**YOU DON'T NEED A WEATHER MAN**

**SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES**

**TO KNOW WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWS 1965 BOB DYLAN**