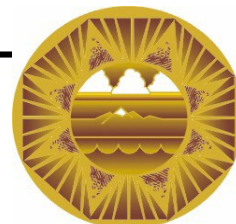


The LEADer

LEADING THE WAY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



Fourth Quarter 2023



EPA HEALTH REPORT DISCUSSED ON THE SWIMMING HOLES ON TAR CREEK WHERE CHILDREN SWIM IN MIAMI

Children are drawn to water, just as we were. It is the source of all life, but as we know can also bring joy in many forms, but it can also be a source that can harm. This has been the issue with Tar Creek running right through the heart of the town of Miami, OK. Who wouldn't want it to be part of your life? Or why would

Confirmed:
Miami Parents DO NOT Permit Your Children to Swim in Tar Creek

The Skeo contractor presented evidence to members of the community but also held a session for City of Miami officials to explain the results from the EPA study of Tar Creek within the city limits where children had been seen in and near the creek.



the founders settle between a creek and a river? For generations children has found it a refuge, until 1979 when the creek turned orange and the fish all died. Since then the color has gone closer to normal and the neighborhood children began to revisit it. LEAD Agency first was notified when one of the neighbors called saying she had been seeing kids with towels and swimming suits and even fishing poles walking toward the creek. We investigated and found many in the water. We warned them and then walked the streets near the creek with warning messages. But without EPA or DEQ saying it was dangerous, how could we prove it? So we asked for a risk assessment to be conducted and EPA did 1/3 mile of the creek, finding evidence of 5 swimming holes. The results prove our warnings were right, but the report went further. Not only the water and the sediment in the creek but also the soil along Tar Creek could cause harm due to the persistant heavy metals.

Skeo contractors confirmed the 1/3 mile area studied is used for swimming and also found evidence of fishing with this lure.

“ENDANGERING HUMAN LIFE FOR PROFIT SHOULD BE A UNIVERSAL CRIME.” — Suzy Kassem



EYE OPENING REPORT

After learning children were swimming in Tar Creek, Sara Goyer had EPA conduct a health assessment on a 1/3 mile portion of Tar Creek in Miami, OK and LEAD Agency asked the agency's assistance to better understand the information it provided and be able to communicate that back to the general public. The TASC program was designed to help communities in this way and provided this technical consultant for us.

At a public meeting we learned page by page from charts filled with columns of numbers. We were back in school. Learning in rows. Seeing in front of us we were at risk of being exposed to not just lead but the other metals in the water in Tar Creek and the sediment but also the soils along the creek. We all knew we could swallow water, and take-home residue in our shoes and socks and contaminate our own homes with the dust and mud, but she added another way we could be harmed when she listed the word "dermal." Our skin can absorb the metals, too. Well heck. She called all of these avenues *exposure media*.

The report was short, it just was followed with over 100 pages of data and that was another reason we wanted expert eyes to go through it.

We learned about algorithms - computer based toxicological models and hazard index. For 27 years the single message we were receiving from EPA was all about LEAD. So, we are pretty good at reciting the harms that element can cause. But we learned in this report, there are others we need to get reacquainted with. Dr. Robert Wright's MATCH Project research on the babies born here found they face multiple metals associated with this site, some even detected at birth that could have only come from exposure those mothers had had in their lives.

The Swimming Hole report revealed lead but also cadmium, arsenic, manganese, cobalt and zinc were present. Though there, the combined risk for cancer was low. That was the positive. The negative was these exposures are real and present. The risk for children to be lead poisoned is **high** if swimming or even picnicking in that inviting and loved Tar Creek corridor near the Disc Golf Course.

This eye-opening report also revealed another new term: *Tribal Life Ways, a term that changes everything about the ultimate cleanup for us all*. People who live more fully in their environment receive more exposure. Because we have a varied Tribal population here, EPA evaluated this area in that way. Our Tribal Use is calculated. Knowing those results will force EPA to cleanup with that information. In other words, a better more effective and protective cleanup will be the remedy for us all because it has to be able to protect that Tribal kid who is probably your child's best friend and constant companion and by doing that, protect BOTH.

How safe it is here? We heard: "We live in a mineralized district." It may well be we begin to realize protecting ourselves from the gifts the earth will be a life-long effort. Mike McAteer said years ago, "Its in the air, soil and water, its everywhere."

And because of this meeting, this report and the interest of the City and her residents, LEAD will be sending in our comments and our desire for more information. Widen the circle. Check all the areas along Tar Creek where people are recreating and where her flood waters reach. Give us guidance on protective measures that should be taken if use is continued, including who and how the areas are MOWED. How at risk are you or city employees after mowing the grass especially during our persistent droughts and is the grass itself loaded with metals?

LEAD Agency will be pushing EPA to create the plan for the permanent remedy to protect humans and the environment on into the future. 40 years as a Superfund Site deserves a real plan by now! —**Your Tar Creekkeeper, Rebecca Jim**

LEAD Agency, Inc.

223 A. St. SE.

Miami, OK 74354

Phone: 918 542-9399

918-256-5269

leadagency@att.net

www.leadagency.org

Board of Directors

Earl Hatley, *president*

Grace Goodeagle, *vice president*

Kelda Lorax, *secretary*

Herschel Kirkley, *treasurer*

Carl Hayes

Stephanie Addis

James Walkingstick

Executive Director

Rebecca Jim

LEAD Staff

Martin Lively

Kindel Maymi

Moriah Bailey Stephenson

Kimberly Barker

Paul Marquez

Margie Berk, AARP

Lucas Freeman, VISTA/AmeriCorps

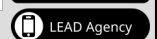
Waterkeeper Programs

Tar Creekkeeper - Rebecca Jim

Grand Riverkeeper - Martin Lively

**The LEADER is published quarterly
and special editions**

Riverkeeper and Creekkeeper are registered trademarks and service mark of Riverkeeper, Inc. and is licensed for use herein.



MUSICAL TELLS THE PICHER STORY The interest in our story started with the photos Quentin Madia had seen and couldn't forget. He and co-creator Lauren Palela researched and began to write a script and compose the lyrics for what would become an off-Broadway production this fall. The musical is magical.



The world premiere of *The Picher Project*, conceived and directed by Quentin Madia, with music, book and lyrics by Quentin Madia and Lauren Palela, and additional materials by Alex Knezevic, ran 4 weeks at the Dixon Place in NYC.

"This new musical explores the rise and destruction of the now-abandoned mining town of Picher, Oklahoma. Once the world's largest producer of lead and zinc, Picher became the EPA's #1 Superfund site, deeming it the most toxic place in America. Based on interviews, personal stories and historic events, the show covers the town's 100-year history from the opening of the mines to the town's demise. While grappling with losing their homes, the town is forced to confront their complicated political divide, unpredictable natural disasters, and environmentally caused illnesses. Through the lives of Picher citizens and the often forgotten experience of the Quapaw Nation, *The Picher Project* shows the struggles of illness, pride, love and loss, ultimately asking the following questions: How do we take responsibility for our history? How do we treat the land we live on? How do we leave our home?"

Featuring a bluegrass and folk infused original score, *The Picher Project* forces us to reckon with our past and take responsibility for our future."

Times Square Chronicles



Rebecca Jim and Grace Goodeagle, both attended the last weekend's performance and presented the playwrights Pendleton Blankets for their efforts to depict the story of a damaged place, the Quapaw hope for justice and the characters who long to make it better.

It was LEAD's hope we could raise the funds to bring the cast and crew during their run in NYC mid-week to perform at the Coleman Theatre. It was an outrageous idea and one we were not able to raise the needed funds to do.

But the hope continues. With the help from Chief Glenna Wallace, she has raised the awareness and the desire from tribes to bring the musical here. So far the Downstream Casino has donated \$25,000 and hotel rooms provided by the Peoria Tribe at the Buffalo Run Hotel for the cast and crew.

Local author Vanessa Lillie went to NYC and saw the musical and will be meeting with Chuck and Ann Neal to help bring the musical here.



Grace Goodeagle and Rebecca Jim present Susie Stone a Picher Project poster signed by all the New York City cast and crew after the Christmas Picher Parade (with former Picher resident Jon Douthat).



EPA JOINS DAM RELICENSING PROCESS

For over two years LEAD Agency has called upon EPA and FERC to commit to working together on relicensing of the Pensacola Dam. American Rivers supported us by naming Tar Creek among America’s Most Endangered Rivers. So many of you signed our petition for an MOU. In October, EPA became a cooperating agency in the dam relicensing’s environmental review process. This means EPA’s expertise in environmental assessment and its wealth of knowledge about heavy metals contamination will have a seat at the table as FERC decides how the dam will be managed for decades to come. We couldn’t have done this without the voices of residents and our Youth Activists! **Thank you all!**

WE GOT OUR MOU!

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR: KIM BARKER

LEAD is excited to add to our expanding staff with the addition of a well known local and regional journalist as our new Communications Director. Kimberly Barker began her writing career with the Miami NewsRecord where she covered many local stories, including many featuring LEAD Agency. She then moved to the Joplin Globe, expanding her reach and covered stories related to the Tri-State Mining District over the last few years. LEAD could not be more pleased that Kimberly has made the change to work with our organization and help us raise local awareness but also widen our reach with the press releases, interviews and extensive understanding of how to message in these changing times. Kimberly brings experience and understanding of our issues and a great ability to connect with the public, one person at a time. She is genuine and a real asset to the only environmental justice organization in the 4-state area. Welcome aboard!



WE HAVE COMPLETED OUR FLOOD SURVEY INTERVIEWS

Thank you

400 SURVEYS!



WE WILL SHARE OUR RESULTS THIS SPRING

“WE MUST BUILD DIKES OF COURAGE TO HOLD BACK THE FLOOD OF FEAR.”
MLK JR

LEAD REQUESTS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PLAN FOR DAM RELICENSING

How the dam at Grand Lake is operated for the next 30-50 years will affect everyone who lives in northeast Oklahoma. The rules FERC is developing now will determine what actions GRDA must take to protect the lake, the watershed, and all the plants, animals, and people who live, visit, and play there.

Everyone in NE Oklahoma should have a say in what rules GRDA will have to follow under the new license. To ensure the public's voice is heard, LEAD Agency has asked FERC to establish a formal plan to engage area residents in the rest of the dam relicensing.

Some of our requests include: providing a dedicated staff person the public can call when they have questions; scheduling public meetings to explain technical documents to the public; translating documents into people's native languages; and offering longer opportunities for the public to submit comments.

We hope FERC will respond to our request early in 2024.

LEAD AGENCY ENCOURAGES COMMUNITY ACTION



**CONTINUE WRITING:
PUT PRESSURE ON
POWERFUL AGENCIES
TO PROTECT US**



Tell FERC how you feel
Post Cards and Letters

Write FERC:

Attn: Secretary Kimberly Bose

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

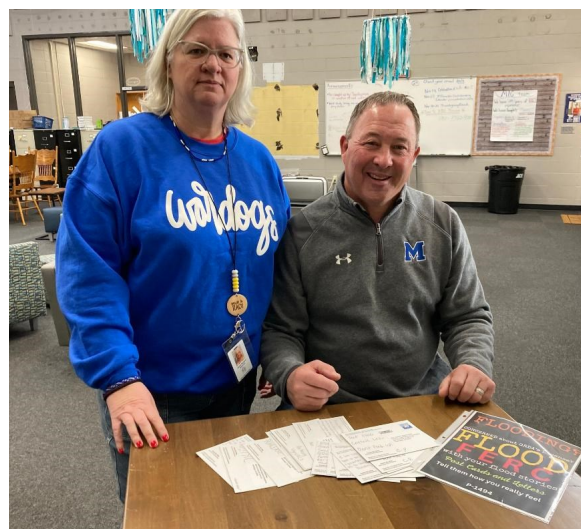
888 First Street NE, Room 1 A

MIAMI INNOVATION CENTER

Before school let out for the winter, Rebecca and Lucas met at the Miami Innovation Center to talk with their students about the issue of flooding and how it affects our neighborhoods.

We introduced them to our interactive flood map and some realized they live very close to the floodplain, and many of the students and faculty wrote postcards to FERC asking to be remembered when they make their decision regarding the dam.

It was a good morning and great reminding kids that they have power and a voice. We're looking forward to the next time we visit!



“LIVING IN A HOME WITHOUT A STORM SHELTER CAN BE STRESSFUL”

STOP ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE ON OKC'S EASTSIDE



LEAD's **Moriah Bailey Stephenson** worked with residents in Oklahoma City who were concerned about a medical waste transfer station being planned for their neighborhoods. She assisted in organizing the efforts to **STOP** this action.

Eastside OKC residents and concerned citizens gathered at the OKC Parks Commission meeting this past Wednesday, December 20th at 3 PM to voice their concerns about a proposed medical waste transfer station at 3903 NE 23rd St OKC, OK. The proposed location is near Forest Park, a predominantly Black township on OKC's Eastside. Additionally, the site is less than one-half mile from a Head Start preschool, senior care facility, and two public parks. The OKC Parks Commission had a deceptively simple assessment to make: Would the addition of this site pose any possible risks to Diggs Park (located across the street from the proposed site)?

Tension and apprehension filled the room as a representative from Medical Waste Services LLC, an Arkansas-based company, attempted to reassure the residents and commissioners that no harm would come to Diggs Park or the surrounding area. They explained that the facility would function as a transfer station where medical waste would be transferred from box trucks to refrigerated semi-trucks that would operate 24 hours a day. Residents and commissioners asked a series of questions, but many of the questions could not be answered because Terracon Consultants Inc., a pro-industry consulting firm hired to assist Medical Waste Services with assessments and permitting, was not present. As the questioning ended, the commissioners seemed reassured that spills from the site were unlikely, but residents still had concerns and doubts.

Residents spoke passionately about how the site would affect their communities and the future of their neighborhoods. The medical waste transfer station would increase industrial traffic and diesel fumes, worsen already unequal air quality in OKC, and perpetuate environmental racism by treating Eastside OKC as a space for unwanted industrial projects. Environmental racism is "any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color" (Robert D. Bullard 1993). Eastside OKC has historically and repeatedly been targeted by environmental racism. The Eastside is the location of 4 out of 5 of OKC's Superfund Sites, and since 1968, explosions caused by a scrapyards have plagued Eastside residents. Further, foul and health-concerning odors blow off fracking disposal wells, and multiple hazardous industrial sites threaten environmental health. Few studies have been conducted on the long-term health effects of these interconnected environmental injustices. Residents, local political leaders, and community advocates passionately argued that Eastside OKC deserves better!

In solidarity and support, LEAD Agency provided resources and assistance to Eastside OKC residents organizing in opposition to the proposed site. We stood in the room eagerly and nervously waiting to hear the OKC Park Commission's decision. The commission unanimously voted to deny Terracon Consultant Inc.'s request for a positive recommendation from the OKC Park's Commission. Instead, the commission found that the proposed site could negatively affect Diggs Park due to its proximity to the site. The city council will ultimately determine whether or not the site moves forward, and LEAD Agency will continue to support residents and provide updates as the struggle continues.

Residents of OKC's Eastside (FPK, Garden Day, Garden Oaks, and others) are taking action to stop a proposed medical waste facility!

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STARTS WITH YOU

VERMONT LAW SCHOOL CLINICS TAKE ON LEAD AGENCY



Both of the prestigious law clinics at the Vermont Law and Graduate School have taken LEAD Agency on as their client.

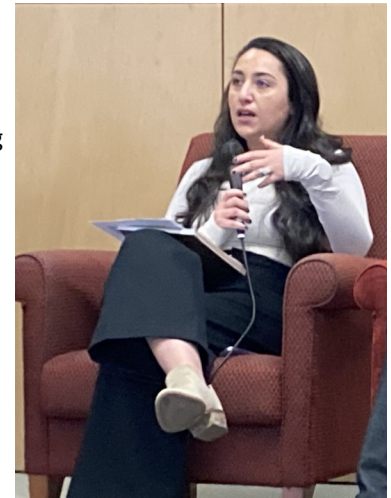
The Environmental Justice Clinic led by Mia Montoya Hammersley and the Environmental Advocacy Clinic headed by Christophe Courchesne and their students are taking on the LEAD issues from Rights of Nature for Tar Creek to getting LEAD at the table with FERC in the fight to protect the City of Miami and the residents who live nearby from flooding.

Earl Hatley, LEAD’s Board President took the initiative to approach VLS about establishing a relationship on the urging from Travis Stills, an environmental attorney who has been consulting with LEAD for a decade. Travis is a graduate of the program and felt we would gain great allies in our efforts with their help.

THE VERMONT JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW 25TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM “NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE”

This year’s symposium fostered positive, solutions-oriented dialogues around restoring natural ecosystems to fight climate change and address social challenges using nature-based solutions. This symposium included four panels: International Implementation, Blue Carbon, Biodiversity, and Indigenous Contributions.

Both Rebecca Jim and Earl Hatley were on the Indigenous Peoples Contributions to Climate Change panel. Others were distinguished scholars and speakers from federal and state agencies. One of the highlights of the day was the announcement from the Bureau of Indian Affairs representative that LEAD Agency had received one of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s America the Beautiful grants for the Neosho Watershed Tallgrass Prairie Restoration Project!



BIRD STUDY ON TAR CREEK

University of Oklahoma student Abigail Triemstra will be completing her Masters in the spring and should have results to share with us on the cognitive harms she may have discovered from birds living in Picher and in the Tar Creek Watershed. At 6 sites, she is feeding birds this winter and has devised a way to measure and compare their cognitive abilities to birds at a site 25 miles from the Tar Creek Superfund site. Do metals harm our birds?