

# Utes not told of frac spill

By Dale Rodebaugh  
Durango Herald

DURANGO, Colo. — The Southern Ute Indian Tribe was not informed immediately of an April 17 gas-field chemical spill on tribal land - that led to the sickening of a nurse - because of evolving spill-reporting requirements, a tribal official said Friday.

“The spill was not reported because it was under the amount the (Environmental Protection Agency) requires,” Bob Zahradnik, operations director of the Southern Ute Growth Fund, said in an interview Friday. “The tribe within the past six months changed its (spill) reporting requirements for tribally-owned or tribally-operated companies and was in the process of making it apply to outside operators. But the Tribal Council had not made the policy official.”

The Tribal Council said in a news release Friday that it has ordered a full investigation into the spill and will take whatever action is necessary to correct the situation and protect members of the tribe, the public, field workers and the environment.

Also, the EPA has said it has launched an investigation.

BP spokesman Curtis Thomas said Friday that Weatherford, the company extracting gas under contract to BP, reported the incident to his company. But the news didn’t reach the Southern Utes because BP was following EPA guidelines, Thomas said.

BP was operating under regulations that applied at the time, Zahradnik said. The EPA requires that spills of five barrels or more be reported, while the new tribal regulations set the limit at one barrel, or 42 gallons, he said.

The April 17 incident involved 70 gallons, Zahradnik said. Ninety percent of the spill was recovered by an inflatable basin under the barrel and didn’t reach the ground. Contaminated soil was dug up and sent to a licensed disposal facility in Aztec.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission doesn’t have jurisdiction over spills on Southern Ute land, and so it wasn’t notified of the spill. The spill didn’t become public until July when Cathy Behr, nurse at Mercy Regional Medical Center, told The Durango Herald that she became sick after treating the worker who cleaned up the spill of ZetaFlow, a liquid chemical used in the industry to increase the flow of gas.

The Herald reported Friday that the spill was on Southern Ute land south of Bayfield.

In a news release Friday, the tribe said:

“The Southern Ute Indian Tribe is aware of the situation described in The Durango Herald article on Aug. 1. We are deeply concerned about the safety and environmental soundness of products and procedures used on our reservation.

“We are committed to responsible energy development and are prepared to enforce that policy on our reservation.”

ZetaFlow is a proprietary chemical of Weatherford, a hydraulic fracturing company working on contract for BP on the Southern Ute land where the spill occurred. The makeup of the liquid is a trade secret.

The April 17 spill occurred at the Southern Ute Gas Unit AF No. 1 well, Zahradnik said. The well pad is less than 1,000 feet from the Pine River.

Behr, who removed the boots of the worker involved in the spill, said she and other nurses noticed a strong chemical smell when the worker arrived in the hospital. Behr became ill a few days later and within a week was taken to intensive care.

Medical personnel weren’t able to learn the chemical makeup of ZetaFlow because of its proprietary nature. Behr began to recover when treated with steroids.

# Tribes use camps to speak on preserving language

PHOENIX (AP) — Several dozen children stand atop a bluff in Hualapai Mountain Park to face the morning sun as it peeks over a distant ridge.

“Nyims thava hmado we’e,” they chant, meaning “Boys greet the morning sun.” And then for girls: “Nyima thava masi:yo we’e.”

Jorigine Bender, the teacher, urges them to repeat the dawn greeting with raised hands. “Everybody, turn toward your brother, the sun.” The youths, Hualapai and Yavapai, recite the phrases in self-conscious, uncertain unison. The language is Pai, passed down to them through generations but unintelligible to the children.

In an America dominated by computers, TV and video

games, a decreasing number of Native Americans, especially younger ones, can speak or understand their native tongues.

The eroding fluency and the potential extinction of indigenous languages have prompted leaders of many tribes to develop immersion courses, such as this summer camp in the pine forest southeast of Kingman.

Loretta Jackson-Kelly, historic preservation officer for the Hualapai Tribe, says there is hope that Pai will survive but only if elders pass on their knowledge and children are willing to absorb it.

“A lot of people don’t realize the implications,” she adds. “Language loss means you lose your identity.”

There is no debate that native idioms are becoming silent, one by one. There are only differences about how many languages will die and how soon.

According to the Indigenous Language Institute, only 20 of the 175 surviving American Indian dialects are expected to survive through 2050. Cultural Survival, an online advocacy group for indigenous bands, says 50 of the remaining native languages face imminent extinction because they have five or fewer speakers, all over age 70.

“It’s clear that the languages are disappearing,” said Leanne Hinton, professor emeritus in the linguistics department at the University

of California-Berkeley, who spent years working with Pai-speaking tribes. “It’s also clear that, over the last 10 or 20 years, there’s a very strong effort to keep them alive or regain them.”

Lucille Watahomigie, a Pai linguist and member of the Hualapai Tribe, says the erosion is largely attributable to historic U.S. policies.

“It was like brainwashing because when they were sent to Indian boarding schools, they were taught the language was wrong,” Watahomigie says. “It was that whole process of civilizing.”

After leaving government schools, many Indians refused to speak their native languages at home in hopes that their children would compete better

in a world dominated by English.

Watahomigie recalls her own experience as a first-grade teacher in the 1970s. Some first-graders in her class could not understand the lessons in English, but she was ordered not to help them in Hualapai, one of the Pai dialects. “I knew these kids were as smart as the others, but I couldn’t get them reading.”

Watahomigie rebelled and persuaded the school to let her teach a bilingual class. By 1975, she had obtained a grant and was helping put Pai in writing for the first time.

By 1990, Congress had adopted measures encouraging bilingual education in native tongues. But decades of U.S. policies and the influence of pop culture had launched a seemingly irreversible trend. Tribal members who fail to learn their language at home seldom become fluent, experts say, and are unable to pass it on to children.

Last year, Congress passed the Native American Languages Preservation Act to provide funding for immersion courses. Jackson-Kelly, the Hualapai historic preservation officer, said she is relying on tribal contributions and volunteers for the summer camp.

Today, an estimated 40 percent of the 2,100 Hualapai tribal members speak the ancient language, but few of those tribal members are under 18.

The language decline is often more pronounced among smaller tribes living near cities, such as the 159-member Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe. About 80 youngsters are camped in tents for the program at Hualapai Mountain Park.

They rise at 5 a.m. for a hike, followed by language sessions. One “master” uses pantomime to teach a native game similar to street hockey, then asks kids to describe the actions in Pai terms. Others teach how to make arrows, gourd rattles and a drink from sumac berries.

Most kids embrace the lessons, though a few seem uninterested.



Associated Press

Jorigine Bender leads Hualapai and Yavapai children in a traditional sunrise prayer chant during summer camp at Hualapai Mountain County Park near Kingman, Ariz., on July 16. In an America dominated by computers, TV and video games, a decreasing number of Native Americans, especially younger ones, can speak or understand their native tongues. The eroding fluency and the potential extinction of indigenous languages have prompted leaders of many tribes to develop immersion courses, such as this summer camp.

# Indian health official denies mess

By Faith Bremner  
Sioux Falls Argus Leader

WASHINGTON — The head of the federal agency that provides health care to 1.9 million Native Americans and Alaska Natives told a Senate panel Thursday that his agency’s property management system is not a mess, despite its inability to track more than 5,000 items worth almost \$16 million.

Members of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee gave Indian Health Service Director Robert McSwain a tongue-lashing and accused him of being in denial after McSwain tried to explain away much of the missing equipment.

McSwain became director May 7, but he has worked at

the agency off and on since 1986.

The Government Accountability Office last month released the results of an audit that identified more than 5,000 items, with a replacement value of about \$15.8 million, that were either lost, stolen or wasted at the agency’s headquarters in Rockville, Md., and at seven of its 163 service sites nationwide from 2004 to 2007.

The missing items included computers, heavy construction equipment and “jaws of life” equipment worth more than \$20,000. They also included a desktop computer stolen from an IHS hospital in New Mexico that contained personal information on 849 uranium miners and medical and computer equipment, worth more

than \$700,000, that was damaged by bat dung while being stored in a warehouse in Billings, Mont.

Indian Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., pointed out that the IHS is chronically underfunded and can ill afford to lose anything.

“We have (Indian) people dying in this country because they don’t get adequate health care,” Dorgan said. “There’s wholesale (health care) rationing going on, we run out of contract health care money, in some cases, early in the year.”

The report could hurt efforts in Congress to direct more money toward Indian health care, said Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska.

“To see a report like we

have before us today ... about this wasteful spending and property mismanagement by the IHS, it truly undermines the confidence in (causes) that we’ve been defending,” Murkowski said.

But McSwain faulted the GAO for valuing the lost, stolen and damaged equipment as if it were new. For example, the dung-infested computer equipment was old and had no value, he said. Another \$6 million in heavy construction equipment was not lost but was given to remote Alaska Native communities after the agency completed construction of sewer and water systems, McSwain said.

Sometimes it’s cheaper to leave equipment behind than it is to ship it out, he said.

“It’s complicated,” McSwain said. “I wouldn’t characterize it as a mess, but I certainly hear you.”

The agency is in the process of setting up a new equipment inventory system, McSwain said, and will start holding the agency’s 12 area managers responsible for keeping track of equipment during their performance evaluations.

South Dakota lawmakers expressed outrage at the report’s findings. Sen. Tim Johnson, a Democrat and member of the Indian Affairs Committee, said missing equipment represents money that would have allowed the IHS emergency room in Wagner to keep longer hours. The IHS cut back the site’s hours March 1 to save money.

# Tribe and Kewadin Casino announce restructuring

Soo Today

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich.— The Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians and Kewadin Casinos announced plans to streamline operations by reducing its total workforce by approximately two percent in early August.

This will affect all Tribal and casino facilities in the Upper Peninsula.

The announcement was made to team members earlier this week by Joe McCoy, Sault Ste. Marie tribal chairman; the tribal board of directors; Kristi Little, Sault Tribe co-executive director; Victor Matson, Jr., Sault Tribe CFO/ co-executive director internal services; and Tony Goetz, casino chief oper-

ating officer.

“This is an extremely tough decision to make, it has not been easy,” said McCoy. “However, due to our financial position and to ensure the longevity of our tribe and the profitability of our tribal businesses, changes must be made. We have to look to our future and make decisions that will sustain our tribe and benefit our membership.”

“Unfortunately, over the years, millions in tribal reserves has been dwindled down to nothing. According to financial analysts, if changes are not made, the tribe will not recover,” McCoy said.

“Although it appears to be a very dim situation right now, it is one that we will fix,” said

McCoy. “We are making adjustments, as hard as they are, so that we can maintain what we have and move the tribe forward.”

“Administration plans to continue to look at various membership services, organizational restructuring, and technology updates that could help their financial position going forward. We will do our best to preserve tribal services for our membership,” said McCoy.

“However, we are taking a look at how we provide those services, where we provide them, and developing more efficient plans to ensure continuity of the top three membership priorities our tribe has: health, education and our elders.”

# Four days of annual Pow Wow starts Thursday

By Andrew Potter  
Marshalltown Times-Republican

MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa — The Meskwaki Settlement will host its 94th Annual Pow Wow Thursday through Sunday at the outside area behind the Meskwaki Casino.

The Meskwaki Settlement is getting ready to host the 94th Annual Meskwaki Indian Pow Wow Thursday through Sunday.

Events are open to the general public with admission \$6 for adults, \$4 for children with children 5 and under free.

The events will be held at the outside arena behind the Meskwaki Bingo Casino Hotel. The event is traditionally held on the Pow Wow grounds but flooding has

made the land unusable this year.

Christina Blackcloud-Garcia, who is with the Annual Pow Wow Association, said the event serves two purposes.

“It’s for us to do our harvest dances and a chance for the general public to watch us,” she said.

Each of the four days will include two sets of grant entry events that include dancing and flag presentations. Each day grand entry events will be at 1:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Throughout the four days there will be crafts and other vendors including food. There will also be a historical preservation tent set up with the Sac & Fox Tribe’s historian on hand to answer any questions and talk about their