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Monday, June 10, 2019

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and 66 Tribal Nations

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1 – EPA grant to help Ouachita, cities review abandoned industrial sites, Monroe (La) News Star, 6/7/19
https://www.thenewsstar.com/story/news/local/2019/06/07/epa-grant-help-ouachita-cities-review-abandoned-industrial-sites/1384353001/
Assessments of over one dozen abandoned industrial and commercial sites in Ouachita Parish will be conducted using grant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency.

2 – Neighborhood worries as city removes radioactive material below their street, WWL, 6/7/19
https://www.wwltv.com/article/news/neighborhood-worries-as-city-removes-radioactive-material-below-their-street/289-4d6416e5-74d9-49e6-a4c1-2fad68cb35e8
Residents in the Gert Town neighborhood are expressing serious health concerns as crews block off a city street to dig up hazardous materials. The city is now working with state and federal environmental agencies and a maintenance contractor to get rid of the material.

3 – Miami residents turnout for asbestos cleanup meeting, Joplin (MO) Globe, 6/7/19
https://www.joplinglobe.com/news/local_news/miami-residents-turnout-for-asbestos-cleanup-meeting/article_23667021-9386-55bc-9e73-eb35d0077bad.html
Miami residents turned out Thursday night to hear how a federal agency plans to go about removing a significant amount of asbestos from their town and what steps are being taken to keep them safe from exposure to the known human carcinogen.

4 – Critical moment shows reason for Corps' flood control decisions. 'How much worse would that have been?', Tulsa World, 6/7/19
https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/local/critical-moment-shows-reason-for-corps-flood-control-decisions-how/article_ecbae002-ef89-5f79-9733-dac393e95d28.html
One day during Oklahoma's ongoing floods stands out as the most stressful moment for the man who has been the area's public face for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

5 – Texas' gas glut is so bad, drillers pump it down wells, E&E News, 6/10/19
https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/06/10/stories/1060511409
Texas drillers may have found a solution to the stubborn natural gas glut that's forced them to either burn it off into the air, or pay others to take it away.

6 – State developing new methane rules, E&E News, 6/10/19
https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/06/10/stories/1060534333
New Mexico environmental regulators say they will be reaching out to communities, environmental groups and industry to develop the state's first methane reduction regulations.

7 – Stay off Arkansas River, officials warn; levels drop, but water speed still perilous, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 6/10/19
https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/jun/10/stay-off-river-officials-warn-20190610/?news-arkansas
The Arkansas River has begun receding and conditions are improving, but the water is still dangerous and should be avoided, authorities said Sunday. Pine Bluff and Pendleton were still in major flood stage, but the water levels along the Arkansas River had dropped below flood stage in Van Buren, Ozark and Dardanelle.

8 – N.M. governor on interim storage plan: 'Economic malpractice', E&E News, 6/10/19
https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/06/10/stories/1060534725
New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham voiced opposition Friday to a proposal for placing an interim storage site for commercial nuclear waste in her state.

9 – Wheeler targets 'worst-case' climate scenario, E&E News, 6/10/19
https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2019/06/10/stories/1060533923
EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler says the use of an inappropriately pessimistic climate modeling tool is driving bad press around climate change, and he's pledged to halt its use.

10 – Staff worried before tests showed high lead levels, Albuquerque Journal, 6/8/19
https://www.abqjournal.com/1326030/staff-worried-before-tests-showed-high-lead-levels.html
When Molly Keyes, a teacher at Bellehaven Elementary School, was given her first tour of the school, the principal at that time made it a point to warn her about the water.

11 – State seeks input on spending money from Volkswagen lawsuit, Albuquerque Journal, 6/10/19
https://www.abqjournal.com/1326271/state-seeks-input-on-spending-money-from-volkswagen-lawsuit.html
A Clean Air Act violation by Volkswagen and the resulting federal settlement means millions of dollars for electric vehicles and charging stations in New Mexico.

12 – EPA curbs state power to deny permits for climate concerns, E&E News, 6/8/19
https://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2019/06/07/stories/1060510579
EPA says it can issue federal permits for projects, including pipelines, regardless of whether states raise questions about impacts to climate change or air pollution.

13 – EPA will drill into Colorado mine for cleanup investigation, Albuquerque Journal, 6/8/19
https://www.abqjournal.com/1325660/epa-will-drill-into-colorado-mine-for-cleanup-investigation.html
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to drill a test well into an inactive mine tunnel in southwestern Colorado to get information for a Superfund cleanup, the agency said Friday.

EPA grant to help Ouachita, cities review abandoned industrial sites

Ashley Mott, **Monroe News Star** Published 9:14 p.m. CT June 7, 2019

Assessments of over one dozen abandoned industrial and commercial sites in Ouachita Parish will be conducted using grant funding from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Monroe, West Monroe and unincorporated areas in Ouachita Parish will benefit from a $479,000 assessment grant awarded by the agency's Brownfields Program.

According to documentation from the EPA, target areas for the grant include the Downtown Economic Development District in Monroe, West Monroe's Downtown Historic District, south Monroe and the unincorporated communities of Richwood, Brownsville and Bawcomville in Ouachita Parish.

Plans for the grant funds include conducting 13 environmental site assessments and the development of cleanup plans and site reuse assessments for two priority sites. Three revitalization plans will focus on Monroe's southside, Monroe and West Monroe.

Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo said working together with the city of West Monroe and the Ouachita Parish Police Jury to obtain the grant funding was an awesome experience.

"To be able to spur economic growth and development is huge, and that is what we are all about," Mayo said. "We want to make sure that we continue to move our cities, our parish forward in a positive way."

West Monroe Mayor Staci Mitchell, Monroe Planning and Urban Development Director Ellen Hill, Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo, Ouachita Parish Police Jury Treasurer Brad Cammack and Region 6 Director of the EPA's Land, Chemical and Redevelopment Division Ronnie Crossland hold a "check" for $479,000. A coalition of both cities and the parish received $479,000 through the EPA's Brownfields Program for assessments of brownfield sites. *(Photo: Courtesy photo)*

West Monroe Mayor Staci Mitchell said target areas for riverfront rehabilitation tie in with other efforts for renovation and revitalization pursued by the city. On May 31, a portion of West Monroe's downtown was recognized as a historic district by the National Register.

"This is a great opportunity for us all," Mitchell said. "I look forward to the next three years ... and learning about all of our different properties and seeing the economic development and the growth that comes from it."

What is brownfields revitalization?

Ronnie Crossland, Region 6 Director of the EPA's Land, Chemical and Redevelopment Division, said many established communities, such as a city's downtown, are rich in culture, heritage and social capital but face the negative effects of abandoned and blighted property.

"Contaminated property, or even one that is thought to be contaminated, can really limit redevelopment," Crossland said. "Without redevelopment opportunities, communities – even though they have deep heritage – find redevelopment next to impossible, and that is where the Brownfields Program comes in. Brownfields revitalization is about investing in existing communities rather than new developments."

BY CHARLES SCHWAB
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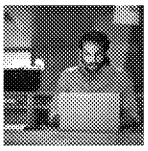

With the funds provided through the EPA program, communities have an opportunity to transition contaminated sites into community assets by taking advantage of existing infrastructure.

Crossland said these assets have the potential to attract jobs, generate increased local tax revenue and raise the value of properties surrounding revitalized sites.

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Brownfields and opportunity zones

"We are targeting these funds to areas that need them the most," Andrew Wheeler, EPA administrator, said in a provided release. "Approximately 40 percent of the selected recipients are receiving Brownfields grants for the first time, which means we are reaching areas that may have previously been neglected, and 108 of the selected communities have identified sites or targeted areas for redevelopment that fall within Opportunity Zones."

There are four opportunity zones in Ouachita Parish with the largest stretching from Millhaven Road to an area south of Richwood and east to the parish line.

The remaining three are also east of the Ouachita River and encompass significant portions of south Monroe and an area along Kansas Lane up to, but not including, Monroe Regional Airport on the east and extending to U.S. 165 on the west.

"The Coalition Brownfields Assessment Grant gives us another opportunity to work together to identify sites along the Ouachita River and other key economic corridors that are prime for redevelopment within the twin cities and throughout our parish," Mayo said in a statement provided to the EPA.

Competing for the grant

Denise Williams, EPA Region 6 Brownfields Competition co-lead, said the competition for grant funding through the EPA program is fierce and requires winners to achieve a nearly perfect score.

Williams joined Mayo in commending Planning and Urban Development Director Ellen Hill and the PUD team for their work on the proposal.

"There were 438 proposals nationally," Williams said. "Four hundred and eighteen moved on to review. In the category of assessment grants, which is what Monroe and the coalition fell into, there were 300 proposals. Of those, 107 were selected. Monroe was one of the 107."

A total of 151 grants were awarded across all EPA Brownfields Programs.

Neighborhood worries as city rem...

Neighborhood worries as city removes radioactive material below their street

The city is now working with state and federal environmental agencies and a maintenance contractor to get rid of the material.

NEW ORLEANS — Residents in the Gert Town neighborhood are expressing serious health concerns a crews block off a city street to dig up hazardous materials.

The fenced off area is just steps from Issac Cheatham's front porch

"I think it a little dangerous back here now because we don't know what's in the ground," Cheatham sa

City Communications Director Beau Tidwell confirmed the presence of underground material producir radiation below the road surface at the intersection of Lowerline Street and Coolidge Court.

The city is now working with state and federal environmental agencies and a maintenance contractor rid of the material.

"I asked them, I said 'what's you all digging for?' and they say 'oh, just some little radiation in the groun Cheatham said. "I said, 'radiation?' They said 'yeah, but it's not harmful.'"

Cheatham and his neighbors have lived on Coolidge Court for decades.

Despite assurances the material is not harmful, they remain concerned about long term exposure to th radiation.

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"Oh no, I'm not taking them at their word," Cheatham said. "I know something is wrong anytime you bri dumpsters and Bobcats and you bring all these tanks to fill them up, I know something's wrong."

Leo Soniat also lives next to the site.

"I'd like to live a little longer if I can, as long as possible," Soniat said. "I don't know. It's really somethin worry about."

The city says it doesn't know where the radioactive material came from.

But, the site is just blocks from where the Thompson-Haywood Chemical Company once stood.

An O'Reilly Auto Parts store now sits on the property on Earhart Boulevard where the plant once mad pesticides and other toxic chemicals.

"They say they are looking for some radioactive particles that have been in the ground for who knows many years.," Soniat said.

"It's kind of scary right now," Cheatham said. "It was a shock to us when we saw them first digging."

Neighborhood worries as city rem...

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According to the city, crews have completed excavating the site and removing all of the underground material and placing it in large containers.

Repaving of the road is now expected to begin Monday and is anticipated to be complete by the end next week.

Here is New Orleans Communications Director Beau Tidwell's full statement:

Our utmost priority is ensuring the safety of our residents. Last year, the Cantrell Administration learr about the presence of underground material producing radiation below the road surface at the intersection of Lowerline Street and Coolidge Court. The origin of the material is unknown and while has been properly contained since being identified, it is now being removed out of an abundance of caution.

After learning about the contamination, the City and its maintenance contractor engaged Baton Rou based ARS Aleut Remediation (AAR) in December 2018 to remove and dispose of what had been ide as a small amount of hazardous material located beneath the surface of the Lowerline Street and Coolidge Court intersection. During the course of this work, the team, which also included the Louisi Department of Environmental Quality, discovered that the contamination area was larger than origin anticipated and would need to be addressed as part of a subsequent effort.

Since that time, the City has been working alongside the Environmental Protection Agency and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to develop a plan to address the contamination area Lowerline Street between Olive and Edinburgh streets. Furthermore, multiple scientists and experts consulted to ensure that there was no current risk of acute exposure or health concerns, and that remediation work would be conducted with the lowest risk possible.

In advance of the start of this work, representatives from the City's Health Department and the Depa of Public Works canvassed within a five block radius of the location to talk with residents and distribu information about the existing hazards, and what to expect during the removal process.

The removal and disposal plan ensures the safety of residents, workers and the environment during c following the removal. Representatives from EPA, LDEQ and the City will be onsite throughout opera to answer questions and be sure that any possible exposure is below the established limits. Crew me are wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including disposable coveralls and gloves is necess limit their exposure.

Neighborhood worries as city rem...

Work began on Tuesday, May 28 and will take about three weeks to complete. Crews have complete excavating the site, removing all of the underground material and placing it in large containers. Penc test results, the containers will be moved to either Utah or New Mexico. Repaving will begin Monday anticipated to be complete by the end of next week.

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Miami residents turnout for asbestos cleanup meeting

EPA begins project at former B.F. Goodrich plant property

By Kimberly Barker kbarker@joplinglobe.com Jun 7, 2019

Miami residents listen intently as Mike McAteer, Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 on-scene coordinator, shares details Thursday night at the Miami Civic Center about the planned cleanup of asbestos at the former B.F. Goodrich plant in Miami. The EPA estimates suggest that demolition debris piles at the property will amount to 23,000 tons of material that is tainted with asbestos.GLOBE | LAURIE SISK

MIAMI, Okla. — Miami residents turned out Thursday night to hear how a federal agency plans to go about removing a significant amount of asbestos from their town and what steps are being taken to keep them safe from exposure to the known human carcinogen.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to spend an estimated $2.8 million from the Superfund program to remove 23,000 of tons of demolition debris tainted with asbestos from the former B.F. Goodrich tire plant in Miami.

Officials with the EPA and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality announced in a community meeting Thursday night that work on the first phase of the project, now underway, should be completed by the fall.

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that was frequently used in various building construction materials because of its strength, but it has been proved to cause multiple health problems. The tire factory employed nearly 2,000 people from the Tri-State Area during much of its operation from 1945 to 1986. The plant operated 24 hours a day, seven days per week, and

produced up to 3 million tires over four decades.

The first phase of the cleanup effort will consist of removing 20 asbestos-containing debris piles dotted throughout the property, as well as the demolition of the oven building and the powerhouse building. The goal is to have this phase completed by late September.

Mike McAteer, EPA federal on-scene coordinator, said each of the debris piles primarily hold building materials, with 40% of those materials containing asbestos.

"It (asbestos) was in decent shape when it was on the roof," said McAteer. "Now that it's been brought down, run over, crushed and been sitting out in the environment, it's falling apart, so it's possible to release asbestos fibers into the community. Obviously, this is a concern."

Throughout the cleanup, EPA contractors will be wearing hazmat suits with air respirators and will be spraying down the debris piles with water as it's moved onto trucks lined in plastic. The plastic sheeting will be folded over the debris for transport. The truck will also be hosed down before leaving the premises to help reduce the spread of asbestos. The asbestos will then be disposed in an approved landfill in Missouri, McAteer said.

Four air monitoring stations will be located throughout the perimeter of the plant to test for airborne asbestos, said McAteer. Unfortunately, the machines only run for a few hours a day and test results can take anywhere from 24 to 48 hours to get back. If wind speeds exceed 30 mph, cleanup will be shut down and resume when speeds have decreased, according to McAteer.

A major concern is the fact that residences and three school buildings are located within less than a mile radius of the plant. Many nearby residents expressed apprehension during the meeting for the health of the children and how cleanup could potentially lead to exposure to asbestos, if it becomes crumbly — or friable — and goes airborne.

Nicholas Crisp, a therapist for the Miami Public School District, said it's a serious issue because there are hundreds of children that attend the nearby schools and play outside during recess where they can potentially be exposed if asbestos becomes airborne. He said there should be safeguards in place for the children in case a problem occurs during cleanup.

"We won't have immediate notice (of air quality), and the EPA is saying that they're going to be more reactive than proactive, as far as if it does happen, and then from there, they'll establish a protocol," said Crisp. "I find this highly unsatisfactory."

Other concerns

Several of the remaining buildings on the site have asbestos-containing material in them. Trespassers have also been breaking into the standing structures on the property where some have ripped out piping wrapped in asbestos.

"It's not anything you want to come in contact with," said McAteer. "We don't want anyone to be exposed to asbestos from this facility because there's quite a bit of it out there."

Others have been breaking into the boarded up buildings and cutting holes in the fences. Security has been increased at the site to combat that issue.

Health issues

Breathing in asbestos can cause lung scarring, mesothelioma, lung cancer and laryngeal cancer. Resident Charity Rogers brought her 3-year-old daughter, Avery, to the meeting and mentioned how they've both been experiencing severe health problems after she moved to the area a decade ago.

Rogers purchased a house within a few blocks from the plant and began becoming sick, which she believes is due to the defunct tire plant. She also said her neighbors also have been experiencing similar medical issues.

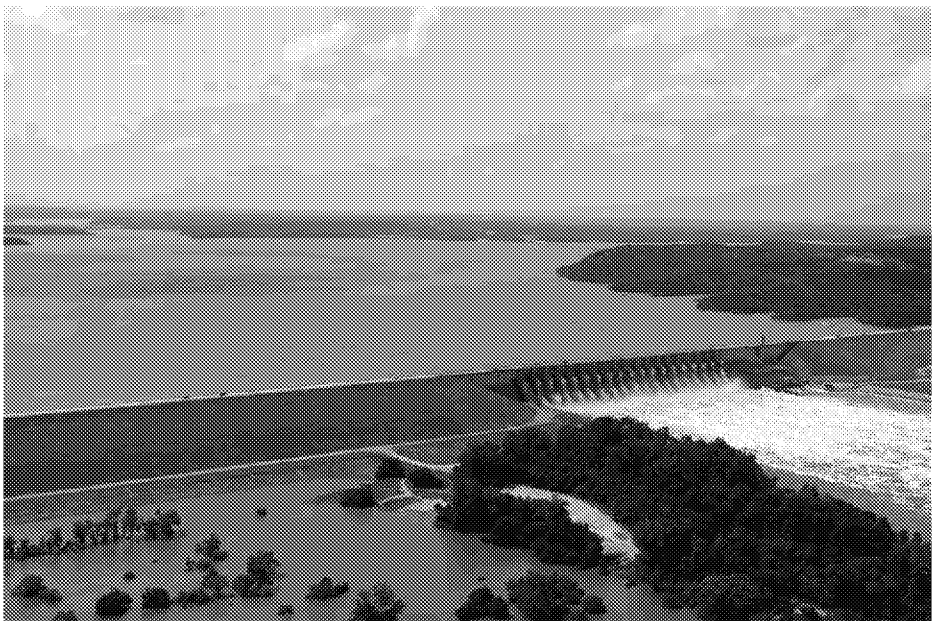
"My neighbors are having the exact same symptoms as I have," she said. "We've all been told by dozens of specialists that we've been diagnosed with tons of autoimmune diseases. I got really sick about five years after I bought the home. I had a mass removed from my head and two other masses in my body. About every three years, I spend about six months in the hospital."

Rogers said she is frightened that the asbestos could be stirred up during the cleanup and wonders why it has not become an issue before now.

https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/local/critical-moment-shows-reason-for-corps-flood-control-decisions-how/article_ecbae002-ef89-5f79-9733-dac393e95d28.html

Critical moment shows reason for Corps' flood control decisions. 'How much worse would that have been?'

By Kelly Bostian Tulsa World Jun 7, 2019



One of the purposes for the lake, as initially designed by the Corps and approved by Congress in 1949 under the Flood Control Act, is power generation and water supply. The lake, at elevations from 723 feet down to 706 feet, is the conservation pool,sometimes called the "power pool." The volume of that pool is roughly 550,000 acre-feet, Williams said. TOM GILBERT/Tulsa World

TOM GILBERT

One day during Oklahoma's ongoing floods stands out as the most stressful moment for the man who has been the area's public face for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

David Williams, chief of the Tulsa District's Hydrology and Hydraulics Engineering Section, said that day also offers one example of why he believes the Corps' operational plan worked as it should and that the weeks-long event has been "managed about as well as it could be managed."

"It was that Tuesday," Williams said, "The short-term weather forecasts were not promising."

May 27, the day before "that Tuesday," the water elevation in Keystone Reservoir tickled the upper capacity of the dam at 757 feet above sea level.

About 2.7 times the combined flow of Niagara Falls rushed through the dam, a rate of roughly 275,000 cubic feet per second.

But the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers raged upstream and pushed an even higher combined flow into the lake. The level was rising, and the reservoir was almost out of space.

With heavy rainstorms forecast and 2-to-3 inch accumulations expected that Tuesday, every armchair hydrologist from Ralston to Vian expected Williams to announce a historic release on par or higher than the record 307,000 cfs that covered Tulsa in 1986. Niagara Falls times three, maybe more.

But Williams stuck to the Army Corps playbook. He said the release would remain at 275,000.

“Just give me two more days,” Williams said informally after that May 27 news conference.

A week later Williams calmly emphasized it was a stressful 24 hours but not a white-knuckle ride.

“We were always in control,” he said. “But we had exhausted the capacity of the (reservoir), and if it rained upstream from the dam, the release would have to be adjusted to meet the inflow.”

The operational plan has the Corps making decisions “based on what is on the ground,” Williams said.

“That’s not been a real popular phrase recently,” he said, “but this (example) illustrates exactly why we manage that way.”

The rain did not fall upstream from the dam that Tuesday. Instead, those 2 to 3 inches hit areas downstream. South Tulsa, Jenks and Bixby saw severe flash floods.

“Hypothetically, if in our eagerness to pre-release based on that weather forecast we had gone to 300,000 (cfs) before it rained, how much worse would that have been downstream?” he said.

Release through the reservoir’s gates never surpassed the 275,000 cfs setting, though gauge readings fluctuated higher and lower, and one hourly reading, at 3 p.m. May 29, shows a peak of 277,252 cfs.

A few hours later inflow to the lake decreased and the Corps started dialing back on Keystone’s releases.

Williams got his two days, and Tulsa dodged a big, wet bullet.

“Most people don’t fully appreciate why you don’t draw down the lake, even with what seems like perfect forecast information,” he said. “You don’t realize you’re in an historic flood until you’re into it, and you don’t realize it’s a drought until you’re into a drought.

What if you draw it down and six months from now it still hasn't rained? Those are always the challenges you face, and that's why we have an operational plan."

Plans do evolve, however. An "after-action report" will examine the chronology of this event, the steps taken and what went well and what didn't.

"We'll identify areas for improvement," he said. "One of the outcomes of the 1986 flood was to make a big investment in upstream gauging. That improved our ability to forecast inflow, and that really paid off during this flood."

Comments on social media and in public meetings have laid blame on the Corps for allowing Keystone Lake to remain elevated in the weeks before the big rains despite long-range forecasts and May being a notorious month for floods.

The Corps simply did not leave enough capacity to handle the extra water, and if they had drawn down the lake ahead of time, trouble could have been avoided, the theory goes.

Williams explained some math, geometry and legal hurdles that make that idea moot, however.

The reservoir is much narrower at lower elevations, so a few feet of water elevation at that point make little difference compared to levels reached during a huge flood, he said.

Besides, the Corps is not authorized to draw the lake down below its "normal" level, which is 723 feet above sea level.

"This business about a draw-down," he said. "There is just not enough additional volume there."

Volume of the reservoir is measured in acre-feet (imagine a one-acre property covered with 1 foot of water).

The maximum flood-control volume for Keystone, the water above that "normal" 723 feet up to the operational top of the flood gates at 757 feet, is about 1.8 million acre-feet, Williams said.

“It’s a multi-use reservoir, but its primary purpose is flood control,” Williams said. “That’s why the vast majority of the volume is dedicated to flood control.”

The other purpose for the lake, as initially designed by the Corps and approved by Congress in 1949 under the Flood Control Act, is power generation and water supply. The lake, at elevations from 723 feet down to 706 feet, is the “conservation pool,” sometimes called the “power pool.” The volume of that pool is roughly 550,000 acre-feet, Williams said.

The Tulsa District reports that Congress assigned roughly 87 percent of that volume to Southwestern Power Administration (a federal agency). Power Supply Company purchased another 11.5 percent, and 13 percent is dedicated to water supply agreements. The remaining 1.5 percent could still be sold.

Water below the 706-foot level is labeled “inactive pool” and is essentially 200,000 acre-feet of water to collect sedimentation.

The conservation pool is used at the direction of those who own it, Williams said. The Corps tries to maintain normal level for both energy storage purposes and for its role in conservation, outdoor recreation and tourism, he said.

Congress would have to propose lowering the normal lake level seasonally or permanently, he said. But it would have little impact on flood operations either way, he said.

“Several feet at that level really wouldn’t make a difference in flood control with the kind of event we just experienced,” he said. “Consider the surcharge (the top 3 feet available for flood control) is 300,000 acre-feet and compare that to the entire conservation pool (the lower 17 feet), which is only 550,000 acre-feet.”

To drive home the point, Williams offered “a fun fact.”

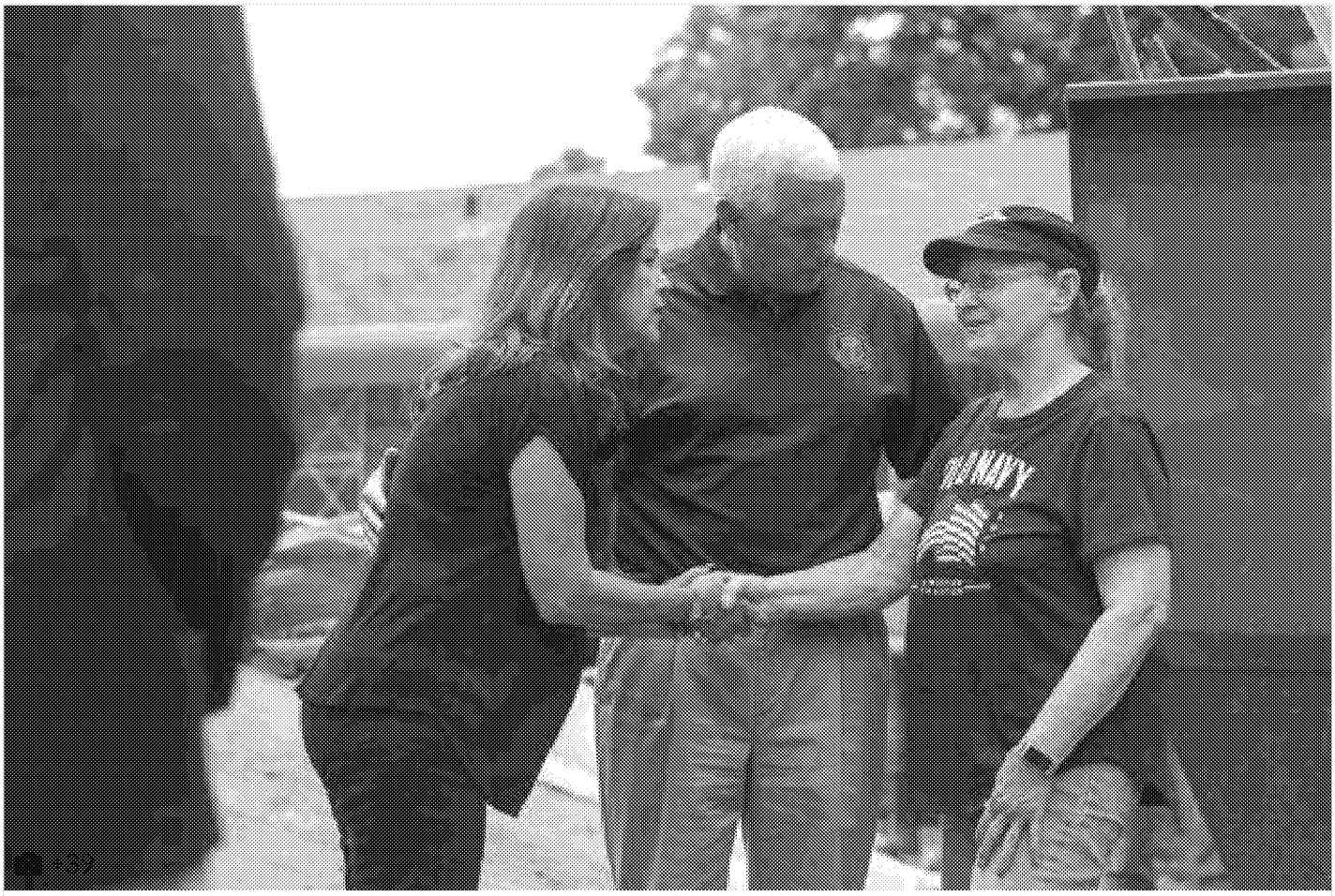
In 30 days, from May 4 to June 4, roughly 5 million acre-feet of water passed through Keystone Dam. Imagine water filling an acre lot, about 209 feet by 209 feet, stretching up into the sky 950 miles. That's the distance from Tulsa to Winnipeg, Canada.

It’s also an amount roughly equal to twice the full capacity, top of the gates to silty bottom, of the Keystone Reservoir.

“The project did what it was supposed to do: to mitigate impacts,” Williams said. “There were downstream impacts, and there was a large release for an extended period, but imagine what it would have been like if the dams were not there.”

Clarification: A comparison illustrating 5 million acre-feet has been edited.

World researcher Hilary Pittman contributed to this story.



Gallery: Vice President Mike Pence visits Tulsa to tour flooded areas
Jun 5, 2019

Photo galleries: Flooding and storm aftermath across northeast Oklahoma
Jun 7, 2019

By the numbers

160,000 cubic feet per second: The amount the Arkansas River can hold, generally speaking within the city of Tulsa, within its banks.

307,000 cfs: Record Keystone Dam release amount, in 1986

277,252 cfs: Peak release from Keystone Dam during 2019 flood

50,000 cfs: Average outflow at Keystone Dam for June 2019, post-flood

45,800 cfs: Average outflow at Keystone Dam in May 2018

Source: Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geologic Survey

Kelly Bostian

Staff Writer

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PERMIAN BASIN

Texas' gas glut is so bad, drillers pump it down wells

Published: Monday, June 10, 2019

Texas drillers may have found a solution to the stubborn natural gas glut that's forced them to either burn it off into the air, or pay others to take it away.

At least five producers, led by EOG Resources Inc., are experimenting with shooting highly pressurized natural gas into past-their-prime wells that have seen their output slip. The wells are then capped to build up pressure inside with the aim of dislodging any oil still hiding in the rock.

The methodology's been used in conventional wells elsewhere with both natural gas and carbon dioxide for years, but it's just now emerging in America's fracked shale fields. The win-win goal: The trapped gas is put to work, and there's a 30%-to-70% gain in oil output from older wells, according to EOG. As the shale boom ages, the potential could be extensive.

"If widely adopted, if it doesn't lead to challenges and the formations behave as we expect, then we expect it could utilize 25% of the associated gas produced," said Ramanan Krishnamoorti, the chief energy officer at the University of Houston.

Natural gas almost always comes up with oil during drilling, but it's increasingly become a largely unwelcome byproduct in Texas. With pipeline capacity for gas limited, prices there have cratered, dropping as low as minus $9 per million British thermal units in early April.

Flaring rises

The result: In late 2018, Permian flaring — the burning off of associated gas — more than doubled from a year earlier to 500 million cubic feet a day, and that's likely to rise, said Stephanie Kainz, senior associate at RS Energy Group Inc. in Calgary. It's a problem from both an economic point of view, and environmentally.

Generally, the use of injected gas is known as enhanced oil recovery, or EOR. Initially, EOG was the main company using natural gas to boost shale oil output, Krishnamoorti said by telephone. "But the fact is that now we have seen four other producers do it," he said. "And with remarkable results."

EOG has been experimenting with EOR for at least three years in the Eagle Ford basin. Gas injection can potentially extend crude production volumes in older wells by 18 to 24 months, Krishnamoorti said. What's still to be determined is how well EOR works in different types of rock formations.

Not all rock is the same, and while it does appear to be an attractive option in many parts of the Permian, it's "not particularly good" in at least one section, the Wolfcamp zone, according to Krishnamoorti.

Stacked wells

There are other questions, as well, said Subash Chandra, an analyst at Guggenheim Securities LLC. The Permian is still in its early phases of drilling and ideally producers want multiple stacked wells because that will likely yield more oil than attempting EOR in a single well, Chandra said.

And other gases can be used if, for instance, the price of natural gas rises as new pipelines open up in the region. Occidental Petroleum Corp. Chief Executive Officer Vicki Hollub has been vocal about using carbon dioxide as a way to boost production and address climate change, bringing it up during Climate Week NY.

But that still leaves one big problem unsolved in Texas. It can be used to get more oil from older wells, and it's more environmentally friendly. But it doesn't address the natural gas glut.

For the most part, producers have disclosed little specific information about how well the new method performs, even in the Eagle Ford, where it is increasingly being adopted. As a result, "it's impossible" for an outsider to figure out how successful it might be moving forward, according to Chandra.

Real application

"You are talking about something that's probably two to three years out in terms of real application," Chandra said.

EOG's experiments into gas injections go back at least to 2016 when the driller implemented a 32-well commercialization pilot. Last year it "converted" 54 wells, bringing the total to 150, according to the Houston-based company's first-quarter presentation.

This "secondary recovery," as it's called, will likely expand as primary drilling development is completed in areas, according to a May 3 conference call.

These Eagle Ford lessons could become "very important" for the Permian as drilling activity ages there, according to Chandra. "Oil and gas at the end of the day is a real estate game," he said. "Once you have the right to the lease which you pay a good amount of money for and spend a lot of effort, you might as well squeeze every last barrel that you can." — *Naureen S. Malik, Bloomberg*

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NEW MEXICO

State developing new methane rules

Published: Monday, June 10, 2019

New Mexico environmental regulators say they will be reaching out to communities, environmental groups and industry to develop the state's first methane reduction regulations.

Environment Secretary James Kenney said Friday collaboration will be key in developing a regulatory framework to ensure methane reductions in the oil and gas sector.

Kenney said he and officials with the state energy and minerals department will be meeting with stakeholders to gather ideas and hear concerns. Three meetings are planned this summer in Albuquerque, Farmington and Carlsbad.

The effort stems from an executive order signed earlier this year by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D) that targets greenhouse gas emissions and encourages renewable energy development.

The oil and gas industry has said technological advancements are helping to curb methane emissions, even as production reaches record levels. — *Associated Press*

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Stay off Arkansas River, officials warn; levels drop, but water speed still perilous

by Stephen Simpson | Today at 4:30 a.m.

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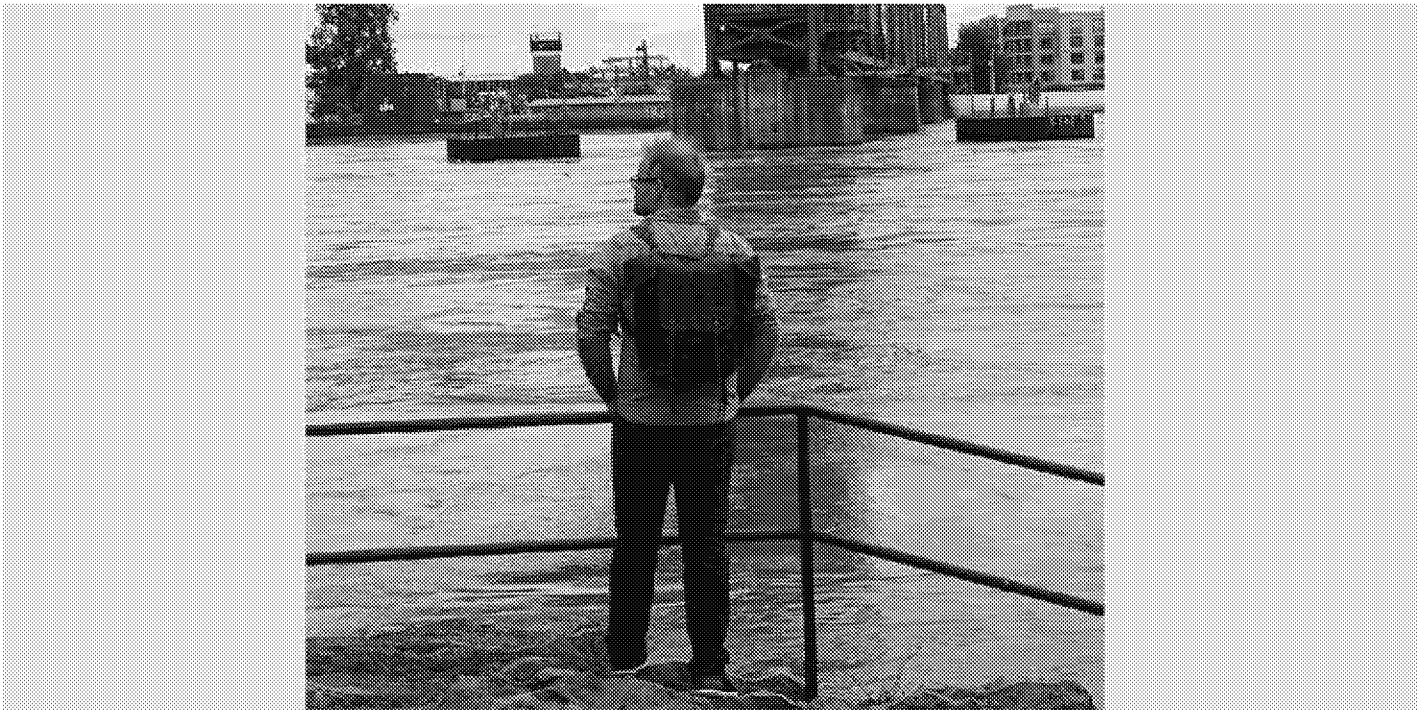

Josh Vanwie of Denver watches the Arkansas River on Sunday from Riverfront Park in downtown Little Rock. - Photo by Jeff Mitchell

The Arkansas River has begun receding and conditions are improving, but the water is still dangerous and should be avoided, authorities said Sunday.

Pine Bluff and Pendleton were still in major flood stage, but the water levels along the Arkansas River had dropped below flood stage in Van Buren, Ozark and Dardanelle.

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I don't want to see this anymore.

In Faulkner County, officials had feared an imminent breach of the levee at Lollie Bottoms late Thursday, but by Sunday it appeared the levee would hold, despite being eroded to the point that barely 4 feet of it remained to hold back the river.

"The water is off the levee," County Judge Jim Baker said. "The grand ole levee held."

ADVERTISING

The county judge credited "divine intervention" for the levee holding over the weekend.

"It was by the grace of God," Baker said. "I know it was nothing that we did. I have seen divine intervention in my lifetime, but this was the biggest."

[RELATED: Flooding keeps weather service busy]

Lollie Road in Conway is expected to be open to the public this morning.

The county's focus will now shift to cleanup, especially in the Lake Conway area, Baker said.

"There is so much destruction there," Baker said. "It was bigger than anything we could have anticipated. Nobody saw it coming."

LISTEN: This morning's top headlines

President Donald Trump on Saturday approved G 7
million to meet the housing needs of Arkansans a
Department of Emergency Management was able

"If you have any damage, then you need to take re I don't want to see this anymore.
management agency because we are in the process of getting federal assistance," agency spokesman Melody Daniel said.

In a letter that Hutchinson sent Friday to Trump, he estimated that the state will need more than $8 million in cleanup funds and $100 million for infrastructure repairs. That estimate could change as water levels continue to drop and reveal damage, Hutchinson said.

The Arkansas River will continue to drop in the coming days, but the water is still unsafe, officials said.

"Even after we get below flood stage, it could be several weeks to a month before it's safe to navigate the Arkansas River," said Jeff Hood, meteorologist with National Weather Service in North Little Rock. "It's easy to look at the charts and see the water dropping and think it's safe. We are improving, but we still have a large body of water rushing down the river."

ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a small-c ver
reached 70,000 cubic feet per second, and that isr

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I don't want to see this anymore.

"The water is moving fast, and debris is also in there," Corps spokesman Laurie Driver said. "If your boat isn't larger than a tugboat, then you shouldn't be on the water."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates it might be a month or longer before the small-craft advisory is lifted.

"Take for example Dardanelle, which is below flood stage, is currently at 250,000 [cubic feet per second]," Hood said of the river's speed. "It will be at least into July before it's safe to navigate the water."

Steve Owen, general manager of Little Rock Yacht Club near Pinnacle Mountain in western Pulaski County, said the high-speed water hadn't stopped boat owners from enjoying the sunny weather.

[MORE: Baptist agency offering flood aid]

"The parking lot is actually pretty full," Owen said. "People are just sitting on the back of their boats enjoying the weather. You can get on the boat from the slips, but will probably be two or three weeks before they can go out on the water."

Fuel sales for the the Little Rock Yacht Club will be hurt by the small-craft advisory, but most of the funding comes from slip rentals, Owen said.

"The water is moving too fast right now, and smaller boats are harder to handle at that speed," Owen said.

The industries on the river might be able to navigate the waters sooner because tugboats can travel when the river is moving at about 150,000 cubic feet per second.

"The company can make those decisions on a case-by-case basis," Driver said.

The Corps of Engineers will also have to make sure its locks are serviceable.

"We have 13 locks on the river," Driver said. "Four locks are operational right now. We have to make sure they are debris-free and the equipment is serviceable. It could take three weeks or more."

For river businesses like the Little Rock Yacht Club, the next couple of days will be dedicated to cleanup.

"Every time a flood comes, it leaves behind mud and sand, and we are pressure-washing the area now," Owen said. "We had a couple of light poles get pu LISTEN: This morning's top headlines as well,

but once the water lowers, we will pull it back up."

Meteorologists at the National Weather Service s e next week.

I don't want to see this anymore.

"Sunshine is the best friend we got right now," Bal

[LIST: Post-flood food safety recommendations]

Driver said that for now, it's safer to just avoid the Arkansas River.

"We got plenty of lakes to go to in this state, and I recommended using them," Driver said. "The water is a little high on some of those lakes, but it's much safer than the Arkansas River."

State Desk on 06/10/2019

Print Headline: Stay off Arkansas River, officials warn; levels drop, but water speed still perilous

Topics

Arkansas River, Laurie Driver, Jim Baker, Steve Owen, Jeff Hood, Faulkner county, Corps of Engineers, Little Rock, Asa Hutchinson, lake Conway, Pinnacle mountain, Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, Pulaski county, Melody Daniel, State Desk, Lollie road

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NUCLEAR WASTE

N.M. governor on interim storage plan: 'Economic malpractice'

Jeremy Dillon and Hannah Northey, E&E News reporters
Published: Monday, June 10, 2019

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham voiced opposition Friday to a proposal for placing an interim storage site for commercial nuclear waste in her state.

With the state's top elected official withholding consent, the Holtec International project is now facing stiff opposition, limiting one of the few potential solutions to the federal government's nuclear waste impasse.

Lujan Grisham (D) expressed her views in a letter to Energy Secretary Rick Perry and Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairwoman Kristine Svinicki.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D). Grisham/Facebook

The governor argued the proposed facility could undermine the agriculture and oil and gas economic activity in Eddy and Lea counties in southeastern New Mexico.

"Establishing an interim storage facility in this region would be economic malpractice," she wrote. "Any disruption of agricultural or oil and gas activities as a result of a perceived or actual incident would be catastrophic to New Mexico, and any steps to siting such a project could cause a decrease in investment in two of our state's leading industries."

Lujan Grisham estimated that the area picked for nuclear waste storage brings in about $300 million a year from agriculture. Moreover, the two Permian Basin counties rank as the second- and sixth-best oil- and gas-producing counties in the world, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

But the location of the proposed facility — about 1,000 acres near the Eddy-Lea county line — would be part of a larger nuclear corridor in southeastern New Mexico. In that region, the Department of Energy operates the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, the first operational deep underground repository for defense-related nuclear waste in the world.

Holtec is in the process of securing the needed NRC permits for the facility to go forward, with a commission decision likely in the next two years. That would allow spent fuel shipments to the concrete pad by 2023 at the earliest, the company has said.

Congressional lawmakers have cited the project as an example of a local community open to storing waste that has been left stranded at more than 120 reactor sites after the 2010 Obama administration decision to shutter the Yucca Mountain repository in Nevada over intense state opposition to that site.

The proposed project could have stored some 10,000 metric tons of nuclear waste. There is nearly 90,000 metric tons of waste accumulated across the country.

Holtec was not immediately available to comment on the governor's letter.

Much of the congressional legislation has focused on authorizing interim storage — and the use of private sites to meet the goals — as central to a solution to the logjam holding back the federal government's ability to dispose of the waste.

A second location, known as Waste Control Specialists LLC, just across the New Mexico-Texas line in Andrews, Texas, is seeking a similar private-sector-led interim storage site permit from NRC.

With state opposition in Nevada to Yucca Mountain and now New Mexico, the Texas site represents the lone potential site to move waste in the immediate future.

Part of her opposition to the project, Lujan Grisham said, included the lack of a permanent solution, fearing the interim site in her state might become permanent.

"Over this time, it is likely that the casks storing [spent nuclear fuel] and high-level wastes will lose integrity and will require repackaging," Lujan Grisham said. "Any repackaging of SNF and high-level wastes increases the risk of accidents and radiological health risks."

She added, "Again, New Mexicans should not have to tolerate this risk."

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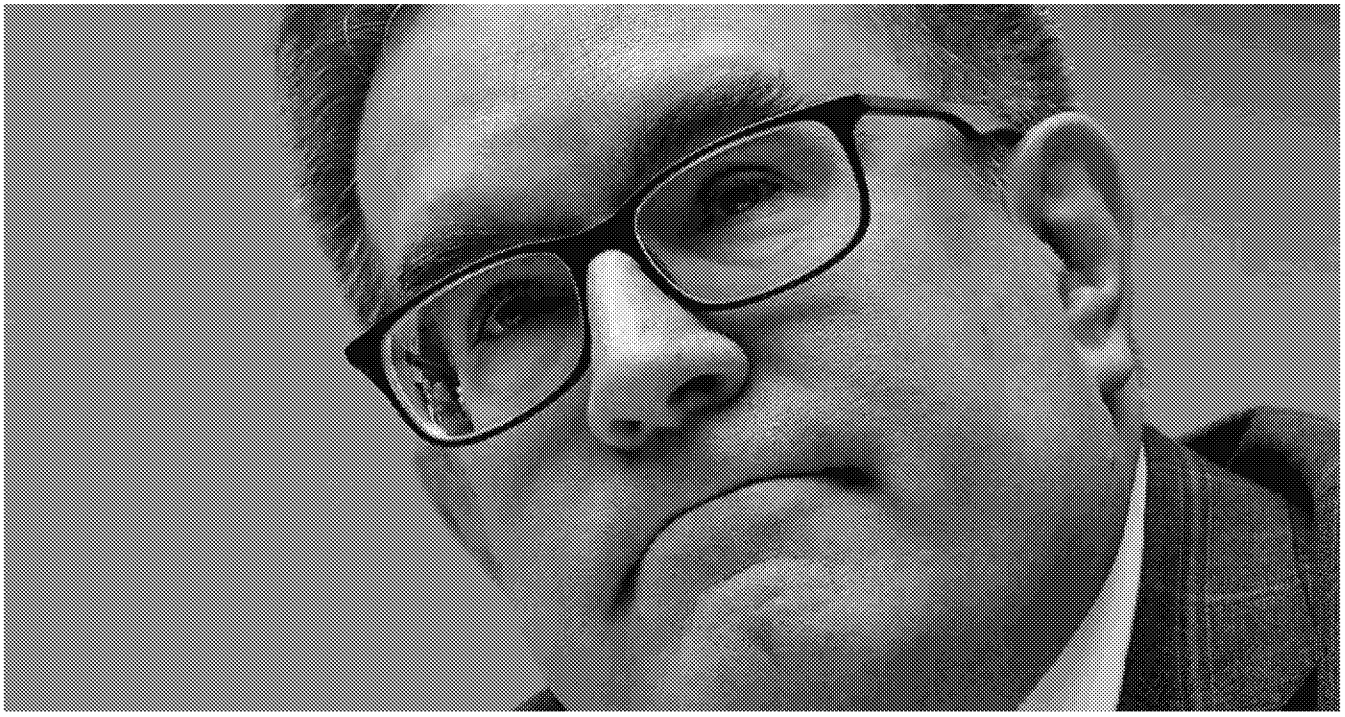
EPA

Wheeler targets 'worst-case' climate scenario

Jean Chemnick, E&E News reporter • Published: Monday, June 10, 2019



EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler thinks scientists and journalists are focusing on far-fetched climate scenarios. Yuri Gripas/Reuters/Newscom

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler says the use of an inappropriately pessimistic climate modeling tool is driving bad press around climate change, and he's pledged to halt its use.

While he was still acting EPA chief, Wheeler blamed overly dire assumptions for the National Climate Assessment, released by the Trump administration last Black Friday — a launch that seemed calculated to bury the congressionally mandated report, which highlighted the findings of experts at 13 federal agencies that harmful man-made climate change is underway and growing worse.

And Wheeler used a summit last month in Metz, France, with ministers from six principal foreign allies to promise to "reexamine comprehensive modeling that best reflects the actual state of climate science."

Then, last Monday at a National Press Club briefing, Wheeler lamented that most press coverage of the NCA focused on what he called "the worst-case scenario."

"I do think we should take a more realistic look at the worst-case scenarios ... all the scenarios ... going forward," he said.

The "worst-case scenario" Wheeler seems concerned about is something called Representative Concentration Pathway, or RCP, 8.5 — a scenario long used by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, federal agencies responsible for the NCA, and the climate modeling community writ large to represent the upper extreme of greenhouse gas concentrations that could exist in the world's atmosphere by the end of this century.

RCP 8.5 assumes the world will curb fossil fuel use by only about 20% over the next 80 years while experiencing relatively low income growth and very high growth in population and global energy demand.

Developed by researchers in Austria in 2007, RCP 8.5 is used by the IPCC and other entities together with three other baseline scenarios that incorporate more optimistic assumptions for global economic development, technology, trade and other factors that could inform future atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations and, by extension, warming. The IPCC and NCA don't rely on one scenario for any one report but show a range. The scenarios don't seek to predict future climate policies but instead focus on longer-term trends.

"We're not fortune tellers; we're scientists," said Richard Moss, a senior scientist doing climate modeling work at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's Joint Global Change Research Institute and a participant in the NCA.

The four scenarios don't translate precisely to specific degrees of temperature rise — experts note uncertainty about feedback loops and other variables. But an RCP 8.5 pathway could usher in a catastrophic level of

warming equal to about 4 or 5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. It's those findings that triggered some of the headlines Wheeler objected to last week.

EPA seems to be building a case for exiling this "worst-case scenario" from future climate reports by the U.S. government. Sir Robert Watson, a British chemist who briefed Wheeler and his foreign counterparts at Metz last month on the U.N. species extinction report he'd spearheaded, said the EPA administrator singled out RCP 8.5 for criticism in his remarks there, calling the scenario "extreme."

EPA did not respond to an E&E News query about whether the "worst-case scenario" Wheeler referenced at the press club was RCP 8.5.

But spokesman James Hewitt asserted in a statement that "the previous use of inaccurate modeling that focuses on worst-case emission scenarios, that does not reflect real-world conditions, needs to be thoroughly re-examined and tested if such information is going to serve as the scientific foundation of nationwide decision-making now and in the future."

"The fundamental problem with worst-case emission scenarios is that they are based on the flawed supposition that the significantly positive trends in global poverty reduction, economic improvement, and demographics could actually slide backwards," he said.

But experts in climate modeling, including some like Moss, who participated in the NCA, say that while RCP 8.5 represents the more pessimistic end of the report's range, it isn't actually extreme. It represents about the 90th percentile of what scientists think could happen this century in terms of greenhouse gas concentrations, which means there's a 10% chance it's an underestimate.

And with Brazil, Australia and the United States rolling back climate policies and emissions ticking upward, it's currently more in line with global emissions than the more-optimistic baseline scenarios.

"We are right on 8.5 right now," said Don Wuebbles, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, who participated in the NCA. "We are on emissions that are higher than any of the other scenarios right now."

The Global Change Research Act of 1990, which was signed by President George H.W. Bush and mandated the periodic release of the NCA, was intended to furnish Congress with information to aid with planning, Moss said, not reassurance.

"The whole point of something like this is to prepare for the future, and I've never heard of effective risk analysis that picks a low scenario and says, 'Let's work from that,'" he said. "This is facetious, but if the planners of D-Day had said, 'Let's pick a scenario where the Germans see us coming and lay down their weapons and run away, and let's plan for that,' that's not exactly going to get us on the beach."

Last week, Wheeler said that the IPCC was "moving away" from using RCP 8.5 in its assessments, but EPA did not respond to E&E News requests to elaborate.

Last year's landmark IPCC report referenced RCP 8.5, but the purpose of that special assessment was to show the difference between a temperature rise of 1.5 C and 2 C. Since RCP 8.5 correlates to at least twice 2 C, it played a less central role in the analysis than did more optimistic scenarios.

Wheeler also blamed the "Obama White House" for setting the parameters of the NCA, including what he called its "focus" on "the worst-case scenario."

"I thought that was political interference by the Obama White House in that process," he told his press club audience.

When asked, EPA's press office supplied a May 2015 memo from the Subcommittee on Global Change Research of the National Science and Technology Council's Committee on Environment, which EPA said reflected Obama White House political policies.

But Wuebbles said it reflected consensus among experts at the federal agencies and tracked with the IPCC and previous NCAs. The memo doesn't set RCP 8.5 as the only scenario to be used — it sets a range of RCP 4.5, a moderate scenario, to RCP 8.5, with some analysis of other baseline scenarios.

Peter Frumhoff, director of science and policy for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said it was ironic that Wheeler was advocating the use of assumptions that track with a quick global shift away from fossil fuels even as he presides over efforts to keep that shift from occurring.

"Mr. Wheeler's and this administration's policies to expand fossil fuels use is only increasing the prospect that we're going to continue to hug that scenario for some time to come until we come out our senses," he said. "But there's no evidence in the trajectory that we're experiencing today that that bending is taking place."

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Staff worried before tests showed high lead levels

By Shelby Perea / Journal Staff Writer

Saturday, June 8th, 2019 at 11:35pm

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When Molly Keyes, a teacher at Bellehaven Elementary School, was given her first tour of the school, the principal at that time made it a point to warn her about the water.

"The water is not safe to drink. I would not recommend it," Keyes said she was told.

Molly Keyes, a teacher at Bellehaven Elementary School, says access to her classroom's faucet and bubbler was restricted following lead level testing at Albuquerque Public Schools. She says she's "furious" testing took so long. For the two years she has been in that classroom, she has reported that kids have consistently been drinking from both the faucet and bubbler. (Courtesy of Molly Keyes)

More from ABQJournal.com

Chart: Lead in schools at APS

Examples of elevated lead levels

SCHOOL	LEAD LEVEL (mg/L)
Bellehaven classroom 105 sink	0.9
Bellehaven classroom 106 sink	0.83
Bellehaven classroom 108 sink	0.79
Bellehaven classroom 114 sink	0.97
Bellehaven nurses sink 55	0.66
East San Jose water source 1	0.25
East San Jose water source 2	0.45
MA Binford water source	0.11

Source: New Mexico Environment Department and the Department of Health

A Journal review of more than 800 water samples from Albuquerque Public Schools revealed that several schools' sinks had lead… *continue reading* »

Examples of elevated lead levels

SCHOOL	LEAD LEVEL (mg/L)
Bellehaven classroom 105 sink	0.9
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Bellehaven classroom 108 sink	0.79
Bellehaven classroom 114 sink	0.97
Bellehaven nurses sink 55	0.66
East San Jose water source 1	0.25
East San Jose water source 2	0.45
MA Binford water source	0.11

Source: New Mexico Environment Department and the Department of Health

That was about three years ago.

"She didn't even use that water in her fish tank," Keyes said.

Filtered water was used for the fish.

Last week, Keyes learned that sinks at Bellehaven had lead levels far in excess of the federal threshold. In fact, several of the school's sinks showed the highest lead levels among more than 800 Albuquerque Public Schools water samples tested by the state's Department of Health and the Environment Department.

But Keyes has been concerned about the water quality at her school for several years.

And while state and school district officials have been stressing that the high lead levels were found at sinks vs. water fountains, Keyes emphasized that students have been drinking from the sink consistently for the two years she's been in her classroom.

This year, APS opted into a state program to test water sources for lead levels at 69 elementary schools constructed before 1990 – including Bellehaven. The district said roughly 5% of the tests came back above the threshold established by the Environmental Protection Agency.

One sink at Bellehaven Elementary School tested at 0.97 milligrams per liter – nearly 65 times higher than the EPA threshold of 0.015 milligrams per liter. Others were at 0.9, 0.83 and 0.79, according to testing documents.

The Journal reported those lead levels in stories last week after obtaining the test results through a public-records request. APS and state officials held a news conference Wednesday to explain how the district was dealing with the issue and to stress that the levels posed little danger to students' health.

APS Chief Operations Officer Scott Elder said most of the actionable water fixtures were sinks rather than water fountains. And most tests were also done in the morning to show peak lead levels, which would likely dilute throughout the day.

"The great majority of these samples that came back actionable were from sinks – not from drinking fountains, not from places where students would drink the water," Elder said at the news conference.

He said all the water fixtures with elevated lead levels had been sealed off, replaced and retested, adding that those sinks would be kept off limits until acceptable levels were found.

Heidi Krapfl, deputy division director of programs for the epidemiology and response division under the Department of Health, previously told the Journal that the levels at Bellehaven weren't a major concern, because the sinks tested weren't the primary water source.

"Drinking occasionally from that, this is not a concern. We would be much more concerned if this was the primary drinking source every single day," she said.

Keyes, the Bellehaven teacher, told the Journal her students have been consistently drinking from both a bubbler and faucet from a sink in the classroom for the two years she's been in the space.

"Kids would bring their own water bottles, and they'll fill it out at the faucet," she said.

The faucet and bubbler were blocked off following the lead testing.

Keyes was so concerned about the water she submitted a letter to the Journal outlining her experience at the school; the letter appears on page A-11 today.

Krapfl said Friday the department still thinks there are minimal health risks even if students had consistent access to this water.

"There are multiple factors. How much water does the child drink each day, when they drink it, because that determines if the water was flushed out, the child's weight, which determines their blood volume," she said.

But if parents are still concerned, they could have a blood lead test done, she said. Though Krapfl cautioned that the test, which would reflect exposure that has occurred within a month, would reflect lead from multiple sources, including paint, soil and pottery, not solely from water.

Elder, too, cautioned against fear.

"We really are working under the guidance of Department of Health and the New Mexico Environment Department, so that people know we are doing everything we can do to keep them safe. I think caution is good, but I don't know they need to be fearful," he said Friday.

Keyes said Bellehaven teachers, who often brought in Brita pitchers to filter the water, were adverse to drinking the water themselves.

"I was assured by teachers that it was deemed safe for the kids, but then they would say, 'I won't drink it,' " she said. "It was a weird culture about the water."

She also described some of the school's water as an orange-brown. Elder said that is a separate issue caused by galvanized piping that the district is also working on.

Keyes had decided in September to stop drinking the classroom water, opting to go to the teacher's lounge, which she was told had newer plumbing than other parts of the school.

Because of the concerns at the school, Keyes was glad the testing was done.

"I was furious that it had taken so long," she said. "But I was relieved that finally something was happening."

However, she was "disappointed" that staff wasn't consulted when the testing occurred. She said teachers could have informed the water testers where kids were actually getting drinking water from.

"They didn't talk to teachers. They just looked at random sinks," she said.

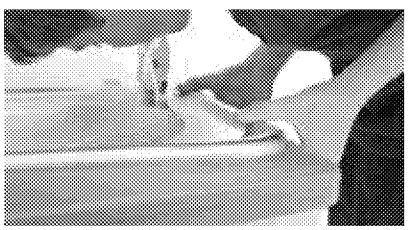
Elder said the goal was to have a random sample to be representative of the school's water fixtures and said more testing will be done as funding becomes available.

Ultimately, Keyes said that testing confirmed what teachers at Bellehaven have assumed for a while. There were issues with the water.

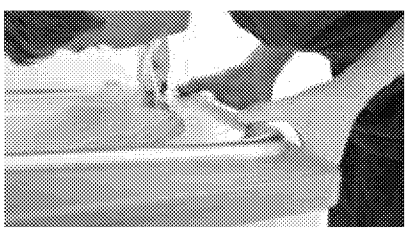
"But we thought if the district didn't fix it for the kids, it must be fine," she said.

More from ABQJournal.com

Elevated lead levels found at some APS schools



Official: 5% of water fountains and sinks tested were above threshold… *continue reading* »



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Bellehaven sinks had highest level of lead in water

Examples of elevated lead levels

SCHOOL	LEAD LEVEL (mg/L)
Bellehaven classroom 105 sink	0.9
Bellehaven classroom 106 sink	0.03
Bellehaven classroom 108 sink	0.79
Bellehaven classroom 114 sink	0.97
Bellehaven nurses sink 55	0.66
East San Jose water source 1	0.25
East San Jose water source 2	0.45
MA Binford water source	0.11

Source: New Mexico Environment Department and the Department of Health

But state health official says there is 'low risk' for health effects… *continue reading* »

Examples of elevated lead levels

SCHOOL	LEAD LEVEL (mg/L)
Bellehaven classroom 105 sink	0.9
Bellehaven classroom 106 sink	0.83
Bellehaven classroom 108 sink	0.75
Bellehaven classroom 114 sink	0.97
Bellehaven nurses sink 53	0.88
East San Jose water source 1	0.25
East San Jose water source 2	0.45
MA Binford water source	0.11

Source: New Mexico Environment Department and the Department of Health

Contact the writer.

Auto Racing

Steve Torrence beats dad Billy in NHRA Heartland Nationals

8 hrs ago

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Steve Torrence earned his fifth straight Top Fuel victory, beating his father Billy Torrence on Sunday at the NHRA Heartland Nationals. The younger Torrence — the defending world champion — raced his dragster to a run of 3.750 seconds at 326.16 mph, while the elder Torrence finished in 3.678

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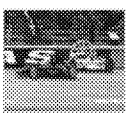

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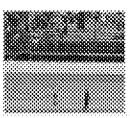

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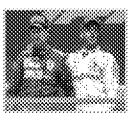

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State seeks input on spending money from Volkswagen lawsuit

By Theresa Davis / Journal Staff Writer

Monday, June 10th, 2019 at 12:05am

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A Clean Air Act violation by Volks-wagen and the resulting federal settlement means millions of dollars for electric vehicles and charging stations in New Mexico.

David Hartung, an electrician, looks at the electric vehicle charge station at PNM during an Electric Car Open House in November 2014. The state is seeking public input on a plan to use funds from a federal settlement with Volkswagen for more alternative-fueled vehicles and charging stations. (Marla Brose/Albuquerque Journal)

The New Mexico Environmental Department has opened the public comment period for a plan to address how money from the Volkswagen settlement should be spent in the state. In the Beneficiary Mitigation Plan, the NMED recommends the funds be used for local governments and others to purchase alternative-fueled vehicles and electric vehicle charging stations.

A federal settlement was reached in 2017 after Volkswagen admitted misrepresenting the emissions levels of its vehicles by installing illegal devices on cars. The settlement provides $2.7 billion to all 50 states and Puerto Rico to reduce harmful vehicle emissions like nitrogen oxide (NOx) and ozone.

New Mexico Air Quality Bureau Chief Liz Bisbey-Kuehn told the Journal that New Mexico had received $18 million from the settlement. Last year's funding cycle awarded nearly $6 million for projects. This new plan proposes how the next $5 million should be spent.

The state wants to commit $2.7 million of the fund to building charging stations for light-duty electric vehicles. Albuquerque has 47 public electric vehicle charging ports. New Mexico has more than 200.

“This plan targets rural locations in the state where we can build electric vehicle charging stations,” Bisbey-Kuehn said. “We want to attract tourists and businesses to those areas. We’re excited to have this funding and see which projects we get.”

Last year’s funding from the Volks-wagen settlement totaled $5,964,208. Projects from that cycle reduced nitrogen oxide by a total of 117.79 tons, according to the New Mexico Environmental Department.

The money was used to replace 31 school buses in Albuquerque and Bernalillo County, 44 school buses in Gallup and McKinley County, 10 solid waste trucks in the South Valley, 20 delivery trucks in the Albuquerque area, four heavy-duty cement trucks in Albuquerque and one San Juan County public works truck, and to purchase three electric tractors and three charging stations at the Albuquerque International Sunport.

In a news release, New Mexico Environment Secretary James Kenney called the state’s plan for the settlement funds “a win for all New Mexicans.”

The NMED suggests 75% of the settlement funding go to on-road fleet projects. That means replacing local freight trucks, school buses, shuttle or transit buses with alternative-fueled vehicles or replacing the vehicle engines with alternative-fuel engines.

An electric vehicle charging station in Downtown Albuquerque. (Dean Hanson/Albuquerque Journal)

“Those are generally the highest emitting vehicles and the highest volume of vehicles,” Bisbey-Kuehn said, adding that replacing or repowering those vehicles would likely have the most impact in reducing harmful vehicle emissions.

Abhaya Datye, a distinguished professor of chemical and biological engineering at UNM, works to make catalysts for engines that help cut down on vehicle emissions. Datye said the state’s plan to replace diesel vehicles and create more electric vehicle charging stations would be beneficial, but there’s also a catch.

“The impact should be immediate, because you won’t have any emissions from the actual electric vehicles,” Datye said. “But there are still emissions from where that electricity is originally produced. So you haven’t really cut down on pollution, you’ve just moved the pollution around the state.”

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order in January committing the state to joining the U.S. Climate Alliance and creating a New Mexico Climate Change Task Force.

“That executive order tasks us with reducing NOx, ozone, methane and particulates in the state,” Bisbey-Kuehn said. “This funding gives us a way to do that. All the projects must quantify how much they would reduce emissions.”

Emission reductions from on-road projects in the plan were calculated using Argonne National Laboratory’s HeavyDuty Vehicle Emissions Calculator, and the EPA’s Diesel Emissions Quantifier was used to calculate emission reductions for non-road projects.

The funding is available to public and private entities. Non-government entities may apply to receive funding from the trust, but nongovernment equipment and projects are eligible for a lesser percentage of the fund.

In 2017, the NMED hosted state-wide public input meetings about the mitigation plan. The public comment period for the revised plan ends on June 29.

Bisbey-Kuehn said the state wants public input to receive suggestions about areas the plan hasn’t considered targeting and how the funding should be used. The public can view the plan on the Environmental Department’s website and submit comments to vw.info@state.nm.us.

After the public comment period ends, the state will revise and finalize the plan and begin the competitive project selection process in mid-July.

Bisbey-Kuehn said the projects are scored based on how much they would reduce NOx emissions, how much money they request and how they would improve environmental justice areas – locations with a large minority or low-income population.

"The EPA has a mapping tool that uses demographic data to determine those environmental justice areas," Bisbey-Kuehn said.

Because of the complex application process for electric vehicle charging station projects, the state will keep the project application window open until October.

Contact the writer.

Auto Racing

Steve Torrence beats dad Billy in NHRA Heartland Nationals

8 hrs ago

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) – Steve Torrence earned his fifth straight Top Fuel victory, beating his father Billy Torrence on Sunday at the NHRA Heartland Nationals. The younger Torrence – the defending world champion – raced his dragster to a run of 3.750 seconds at 326.16 mph, while the elder Torrence finished in 3.678

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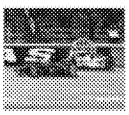

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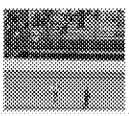

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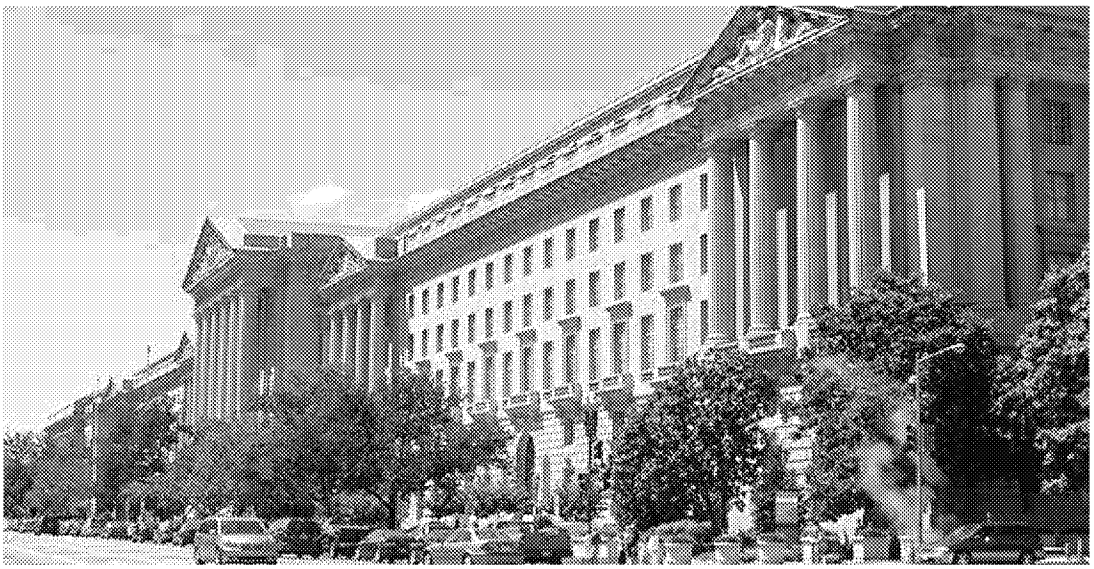
CLEAN WATER ACT

EPA curbs state power to deny permits for climate concerns

Ariel Wittenberg, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, June 7, 2019



U.S. EPA headquarters in Washington, D.C. EPA/Wikipedia

EPA says it can issue federal permits for projects, including pipelines, regardless of whether states raise questions about impacts to climate change or air pollution.

Section 401 of the Clean Water Act gives states the right to "certify" that projects requiring federal permits comply with both the act and their water quality standards. That means projects being permitted federally by EPA, the Army Corps of Engineers or the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission also must be approved, denied or approved with conditions by states.

In recent years, New York and Washington have used this certification process to deny permits for pipelines and coal terminals not just due to water quality concerns, but also because of their contribution to air pollution and climate change.

Guidance issued today by EPA seeks to limit that practice. The guidance is meant as a stand-in while EPA works on formal regulations.

The guidance itself doesn't carry the rule of law, and therefore states are not bound by it. But it serves as a significant warning shot. States that ignore EPA guidance could well find themselves in court, either fighting EPA for ignoring their certification decisions or fighting with industry.

It says that state certifications should be limited to water quality issues and standards described in the Clean Water Act.

If a state tries to deny a permit or place conditions on it unrelated to water quality, EPA says federal agencies should discuss whether the state has waived its right to certify the project and allow the permit to proceed anyway.

"Though Section 401 envisions a robust state and tribal role in federal permitting and licensing process, it places limitations on how that role may be implemented to maintain an efficient permitting process within the overall cooperative federalism construct established by the (Clean Water Act)," EPA wrote.

The guidance document also limits how much time states have to make their certification decisions.

The Clean Water Act itself gives them up to a year but does not say whether that timeline begins once a permit application has been received or once a state deems it has enough information to make a decision.

That has resulted in state reviews taking multiple years as they ask applicants for more information about how projects might affect water quality or the environment.

EPA's guidance today clarifies that the clock begins when a state receives an application and cannot be stopped even if applicants don't respond to state requests for more information or if states want to wait for federal environmental assessments to be completed before making their decisions.

"An outstanding or unfulfilled request for information or documents does not pause or toll the timeline for action on a certification request," the guidance says.

It argues that although "outstanding information requests or non-responsive project proponents can be challenging, the EPA recognizes that states and tribes are water resource experts and have significant experience issuing permits and approvals for many types of projects, including for discharges to waters, dredge and fill projects, and above- and below-ground pipelines in their jurisdictions."

"EPA encourages states and tribes to evaluate the potential risk associated with information or data gaps and consider issuing timely certification with conditions that may address those potential risks," the guidance says.

Trump's order and reaction

The document follows President Trump's April executive order directing EPA to look at its regulations for Clean Water Act certifications as a way to boost the oil and gas industry (***Energywire***, April 9).

Senate Republicans, who were supportive of Trump's order, are already applauding the new guidance.

"States should not be able to hijack the Clean Water Act to shut down important energy projects," Environment and Public Works Chairman John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) said in a statement. "We need reform, and we need it fast. States like Washington, New York, and New Jersey are preventing us from using and exporting our energy resources. President Trump and I share a strong commitment to addressing this critical issue."

Industry groups are also praising the guidance.

"We welcome this guidance as clear guideposts for federal, state and tribal authorities are needed that respect and support the important and distinctive roles of each participant," said Don Santa, CEO of the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America.

But the move is likely to be opposed by states and state groups accusing the Trump administration of trampling on states' rights.

The Western Governors' Association, which represents 19 states and three Pacific territories, has long been critical of any attempt to limit states' Clean Water Act certifications and last month told EPA that "curtailing or reducing state authority under CWA Section 401, or the vital role of states in maintaining water quality within their boundaries, would inflict serious harm to the division of state and federal authorities established by Congress."

Today, the group said it "remains concerned about EPA's guidance addressing states' authority to protect and manage their water resources under Clean Water Act."

Legal questions

It's not clear whether EPA's new stance would stand up in court.

While courts of appeals have recently issued rulings supporting the idea that states must stick to a one-year timeline and that having an applicant withdraw and then resubmit a permit application does not restart the clock, case law on the scope of certifications is less supportive of EPA's stance.

While courts have not directly addressed the question of climate change in Section 401 reviews, they have largely found that states have the right to issue conditions and denials that they want.

In 1997, for example, the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that FERC could not invalidate conditions set by the state of Vermont about construction timelines.

In 1994, the Supreme Court ruled in *Public Utility District No. 1 of Jefferson County v. Washington Department of Ecology* that states could condition hydropower permits to ensure minimum stream flows, even though stream flow is not something directly addressed in the Clean Water Act.

That's something EPA's guidance seems to recognize, stating, "Some courts in limited jurisdictions have concluded that the [Clean Water Act] does not authorize federal permitting agencies to reject conditions of a Section 401 Certification and that a federal license or permit must contain all conditions of a certification."

EPA will drill into Colorado mine for cleanup investigation

By Associated Press

Friday, June 7th, 2019 at 5:56pm

DENVER — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to drill a test well into an inactive mine tunnel in southwestern Colorado to get information for a Superfund cleanup, the agency said Friday.

The EPA said it will drill into the American Tunnel next month to measure water levels and investigate how the passage is connected to other shafts.

The agency is looking for ways to stop or treat contaminated water pouring into rivers from old mine sites in the Bonita Peak Superfund area north of Silverton.

The agency designated the Superfund site after it inadvertently triggered a spill while doing excavation work at the inactive Gold King Mine in August 2015. The spill released 3 million gallons (11.4 million liters) of wastewater, polluting rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

The Gold King is part of the Superfund cleanup.

The EPA said it would follow strict safety guidelines when drilling the test well into the American Tunnel.

The agency also said it has modified an order to Sunnyside Gold Corp. to pay for some of the cleanup investigation, but no details of the changes were released.

Sunnyside owns property in the area, and the EPA wants the company to help pay for the cleanup. Sunnyside says it's not responsible for the pollution and shouldn't have to pay.

Sunnyside reclamation director Kevin Roach said the company is reviewing the revised order.

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8 hrs ago

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Local coalition awarded $479,000 EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant

By:
ALLISON BRUHL
Updated: Jun 08, 2019 08:23 AM CDT

MONROE, La. (06/07/19) - Today, EPA Region 6 Director, Ronnie Crossland and his staff, gave a big announcement at the Origin Bank Rivermarket. The local coalition of Monroe, along with West Monroe and the Ouachita Parish police jury, was awarded an EPA brownfield assessment grant.

The $479,000 grant will help stimulate local economic development. More specifically, it will filter funds into previously developed land that is not being used by the city. Monroe mayor Jamie Mayo says he is excited for what the future will hold.

"We continue to be aggressive in our efforts to spur economic development. We got a lot of great things happening in the city of Monroe, and being the lead on this project is significant," said Mayor Mayo.

The assessment grant provides funding for inventories, planning, environmental assessments, and community outreach. The performance period for this grant is three years.