

## Local tribes encouraged after recent meetings

By Randy Petersen  
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Several tribal representatives said they are hopeful after meeting with the federal technical team sent to examine the Tar Creek Superfund site this week.

"I thought it was very positive," said Barbara Kyser-Collier, environmental director for the Wyandotte Nation.

She said the federal experts seemed concerned and were willing to listen to area residents.

Tabitha Worley of the Quapaw Tribe said she initially was concerned that the detailed concerns of the tribes might be neglected, but noted the federal team was willing to listen and discuss options.

"They were very attentive to the presentations by the tribes," she said.

Brian White of the Peoria Tribe echoed those thoughts. "I think it was a very good step. It was a positive meeting." Among concerns voiced by the tribal representatives were health issues, protection of cultural practices, protection of assets such as land and chat and water quality.

While many of the concerns discussed did not fall directly into the scope of the technical team's mission, many noted the members listened and said they would keep concerns in mind during their studies.

"They said it kind of opened their eyes," said Roxane Weldon, environmental director of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe. During the second day of local meetings, the technical team, state and local officials began talking about the proposed wetlands project and other options that could exist.

Worley said team members noted that parts of the state-proposed plan may not work, but options and variations could be used to address many of the problems.

With the wetlands proposal covering 17 square miles of the 40 square-mile Superfund site, Worley said members of the Quapaw Tribe have always thought more should be done.

"We don't think this is a holistic solution by any means," she said.

Variations to the wetlands project included the creation of a lake or reservoir to hold contaminated water, the development of smaller wetland areas and a proposal to return chat to underground caverns.

Kyser-Collier said many of the options discussed were a stepping off point for future planning.

"It was a lot of 'what-ifs,'" she said.

Worley said the Quapaw Tribe has a special interest in any proposals discussed that involved moving the chat in any manner. Quapaw members own a large portion of the chat currently housed in northern Ottawa County. Worley said she suggested one option that would give the federal team flexibility when considering how to handle the chat issue. "We think the best avenue

is for the government to buy the chat now at fair market value," she said. Weldon said interest in what happens to the chat doesn't stop with the sale of the mine waste.

Chat from the Tar Creek area has already appeared in a variety of areas in the region. As a result, Weldon said there is concern about the spread of lead contamination.

With the need to remove the chat, the desire to make sure owners are compensated and the worry about possible future risks, Weldon said the technical team will need to consider all the issues carefully.

"It's going to be a hard problem to solve," she said. Cody White of the Modoc Tribe said he feels the federal team will try to keep local concerns in mind during future discussions.

Still, he said the scope of the problem means a solution will take time.

"I don't feel like we're much further than we were 20 years ago," he said.

Many tribal representatives noted the meetings this week were necessary in order to get closer to a solution.

"It was a necessary step if they are going to secure any type of Congressional funding," Worley said.

Kyser-Collier said the team members from Washington, D.C., may have a better understanding about where funding could be obtained.

Brian White said the funding issue will remain a road block without continued attention.

"We're still at the same road block we were a month ago," he said.

But he noted the increased federal interest could change that.

"It's finally getting the recognition it deserves," he said of the local environmental problem.

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