

Statement

June 20, 2013

For Immediate Release

The Northern Arapaho Tribe noted with interest the joint announcement by the EPA and Matt Mead, Governor for Wyoming, about groundwater contamination issues near Pavillion, Wyoming.

The Tribe is pleased that Governor Mead acknowledges EPA's vital role in monitoring safe drinking water within the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The Tribe sees both strengths and weaknesses in the approach described in the announcement.

"The substance of this agreement appears to have been negotiated between the Governor, representatives of industry, and EPA officials in Washington D.C.," said Darrell O'Neal, Chairman of the Northern Arapaho Business Council. "It's probably a good thing that the issues at Pavilion are getting attention at the highest level," O'Neal said, "but the Governor and his associates in D.C. need to do a better job involving residents of Fremont County and representatives of tribal government in the process."

"EPA staff in Washington, D.C. made some mistakes here," said Ronald Oldman, Co-Chairman of the Northern Arapaho Business Council. "They have a legal duty to consult with the Tribe and that didn't happen as part of their dialogue with the Governor."

The Tribe is also concerned with Wyoming's Oil and Gas Conservation Commission's participation regarding water quality testing on the Reservation because of the permanent injunction issued against WOGCC since 1969. "They don't have authority to regulate the Tribe's minerals. Any cooperative agreement between the Governor and the EPA needs to be mindful of this," said O'Neal.

The Tribe is pleased to see the role for independent experts that is described in the announcement, but concerned with the conflict of interest for Wyoming to support this research with funds from EnCana, the oil and gas producer in the Pavillion area. Much of the public dialogue so far has been dominated by persons that have close ties with the oil and gas industry. However, the Tribe recognizes the Governor's efforts to fund independent experts as a welcome change.

The best approach to the issues at Pavillion continue to require extensive cooperation between federal, state and tribal government.

"We need to find a way to work together on this for the benefit of all stakeholders," said Co-Chair O'Neal.