

**PAWNEE NATION OF OKLAHOMA FILES SUIT TO PROTECT TRIBAL LANDS
AND WATER FROM ILLEGAL OIL AND GAS DRILLING.**

Contact:

Andrew Knife Chief, Executive
Director, Pawnee Nation, (918)
762-3621

November 18, 2016: Today, the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, and tribal member Walter Echo-Hawk, filed suit against the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to challenge federal oil and gas approvals on Pawnee lands. The lawsuit seeks to set aside numerous oil and gas leases and drilling permits approved in recent years that violate both federal and tribal law.

BLM and BIA issued the oil and gas approvals without consulting with the Nation or complying with tribal natural resource protection laws, including a 2015 Pawnee moratorium on new oil and gas approvals. The agencies also ignored the impacts of the drilling they were approving on the adjacent Cimarron River and its contribution to the wave of induced earthquakes that have rocked Oklahoma in recent years.

“Today the Pawnee Nation has taken the first steps towards asserting our right to protect our natural resources so that future generations will have full enjoyment of them. Since the very beginning we have only asked that our trustees provide us with adequate notice, recognize our legal authority to assert our constitutional rights as a sovereign nation, and help ensure that irresponsible actors are held accountable for their actions on our lands.” Andrew Knife Chief, Executive Director Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma, alleges that BIA and BLM violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the federal government’s duties as trustee to the Pawnee Nation and its members, as well as other statutes. In addition to BLM and BIA, Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell is named as a defendant. The Pawnee Nation and Mr. Echo-Hawk are represented by the public interest law firm Earthjustice.

The lawsuit follows a moratorium on leasing and hydraulic fracturing approvals adopted in October 2015 by the Pawnee Nation. Recognizing the new and different risks posed by modern hydraulic fracturing operations, the Pawnee called for a time out on leasing and permit approvals until the Nation, BIA and BLM can jointly develop a policy to address earthquakes and other concerns. BIA and BLM have not honored the moratorium, however.

“It bothers us that the Pawnee Nation has asked for a moratorium on the Fracturing process conducted on our lands and have largely been ignored, we have stated that ‘we aren’t against oil and gas production’ but we are certainly against methods which hurt our land base, minerals and water. The earthquakes are a great motivator, for us to move to protect our land, resources and people.” W. Bruce Pratt, President, Pawnee Nation.

The risks driving the Pawnee moratorium include potential water pollution, harm to tribal water rights, and the threat of earthquakes from disposal of fracturing waste water. Despite these issues, BIA and BLM have approved drilling operations along the Cimarron River without consulting with the Nation.

The Nation's fears were realized in early September 2016, when the largest earthquake in Oklahoma history (magnitude 5.8) struck the Pawnee area. The quake damaged many of the Nation's administrative buildings as well as Mr. Echo-Hawk's house, and caused structural damage to numerous other homes and buildings. The lawsuit charges that under NEPA, the federal agencies must analyze the threat of earthquakes and disclose that information to the public before approving oil and gas development that requires hydraulic fracturing.

"Unfortunately the risks have become too great, the needs too urgent, and the time too short for us to act. What we are asking for is a reasoned approach to solving the earthquake issues that affect the entire State of Oklahoma and we are hopeful that our taking this step will begin that process." Andrew Knife Chief, Executive Director Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma.

Echo-Hawk is a tribal member who joined the lawsuit as a landowner affected by federal oil and gas development of Indian lands. "This lawsuit seeks to make federal agencies accountable to federal and tribal law when developing Indian resources," he said, "and that includes accountability from man-made earthquakes caused by that activity." The plaintiffs hope the public interests of all Oklahomans will be served by making the federal government respond to the earthquake crisis that confronts the entire state, rather than ignoring this growing public safety concern.