Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Ada E. Deer announced today that a settlement has been reached in a lawsuit filed on behalf of the Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma (the Nation) by the federal government. "This settlement will bring to a conclusion almost five (5) decades of dispute over the issue of pollution, caused by oil and gas drilling, of groundwater used by the Nation," Ms. Deer said.

The Department of Justice at the request of the Bureau of Indian Affairs instituted a lawsuit against Tenneco Oil Company, this year, for contaminating the water supply and lands used by the Nation. Tenneco implemented a process which involved the injection of saltwater into the ground in large volumes under high pressure in order to force oil and gas into adjacent wells to be pumped to the surface. The federal government contended that the Nation's sole source of drinking water was ruined by Tenneco's failure to properly construct and maintain the water flooding and oil production systems.

The settlement will provide the Nation with a new water system and $1.16 million in compensation for contamination to the water supply and tribal lands. Additionally, Tenneco will reforest a pecan grove, restore an area of tribal land damaged by oil and gas related activities and install a water recovery system on the Deep Fork River, which crosses tribal lands, enabling the Nation to irrigate the land and develop a farming economy.

The federal government filed the lawsuit under the provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act. This lawsuit demonstrates the cooperation which exists among various federal agencies (in this case, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Justice) in protecting the interests of federally recognized tribes. "The BIA will continue to support tribal governmental sovereignty by ensuring that the federal government properly exercises its trust responsibility," Ms. Deer said.