

Rice farmers ask for immediate enforcement of court order against alleged polluter of Skull Creek

EAST BERNARD, Texas (April 17, 2019) – Rice farmers are asking for immediate enforcement of a court order against an alleged polluter of Skull Creek, a tributary of the Colorado River, which provides irrigation water to grow rice.

The toxic spill does not pose any immediate risks to rice crops currently being planted and farmers want to keep it that way, said Ronald Gertson, chairman of the Colorado Water Issues Committee, which represents rice farmers in the lower Colorado River basin.

“LCRA has told me that their tests downstream and at irrigation intakes do not indicate contamination beyond drinking water standards,” said Gertson “This says to me there is no reason to believe there is an imminent threat to crops irrigated from the Colorado.”

On April 12, Inland Environmental and Remediation Inc., an oil and gas recycling company, was ordered to stop discharging any illegal waste into Skull Creek from its Altair facility. The temporary restraining order request was part of a suit against Inland Environmental by the Attorney General’s office on behalf of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Over the past two months, a dark oily substance with foul odor has been seen three times in the creek, which flows into the Colorado River south of Altair.

CWIC wants evidence that Inland Environmental is immediately complying with the court order - which also requires the company to contain all waste in covered containers with no leaks, drain liquid waste from open-air containment basins and place it in covered containers, and stop waste-vessel washout operations unless waste is contained within an area on site.

“We need proof that this order is being implemented now and monitored to ensure no further contamination,” said Gertson. “Enforcement action has been slow in coming and we’re expecting state agencies to make up for lost time.”

In early February, when the first spill was sited, Colorado County officials reported it to the TCEQ, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Railroad Commission. No state action was taken until April 12 when the Attorney General filed suit in the 53rd Judicial District.

On April 8, the Colorado County Commissioners Court passed a resolution to enable the county to convene a grand jury and conduct a criminal investigation into the contamination.

On April 16, the Lower Colorado River Authority authorized its general manager to “take all actions necessary” to pursue enforcement actions for violations of water quality rules.

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The Colorado Water Issues Committee (cwiconline.org) aims to facilitate the availability of Colorado River water supplies for rice production in the four major irrigation operations on the Colorado River.

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