



Senecas want radiation in Cattaraugua Creek gone 'right now'

By MIKE DESMOND · 1 HOUR AGO



GOOGLE MAPS

Cattaraugus Creek flows through much of the Seneca Nation's Cattaraugus Territory, along the southern border of Erie County. It carries radiation from West Valley and the president of the Seneca Nation wants it removed.

The radiation in the Buttermilk Creek tributary comes from the former Nuclear Fuel Services plant, better known these days as the West Valley Demonstration Project. That federal effort is supposed to clean up the heavily radioactive waste in the closed re-processing center, which it is doing slowly as money comes in.

It is not dealing with a lot of buried radioactive waste around the actual facility. Seneca President Todd Gates said determining what to do has gone on way too long.

"I've been on the Citizens Task Force for about 20 years, officially, and been involved even longer, but my concern is right now, we're going through a Record of Decision where they're looking at or doing probability assessments on and what they really are leaving that stuff in place," Gates said.



Gates said he wants it gone, even if it means shifting it to somewhere else.

"We want it out of there," he said. "Everyone talks about cancer, but there's other things. There are thyroid problems. There's arthritis. I have arthritis. I have an artificial hip. Those are the side effects of long-term exposure to low-levels of radiation, which is there. They've identified hot spots along the watershed area."

He said American Indians have paid an exorbitant price for the nuclear age because so many reservations house nuclear waste or even radioactive waste from uranium mining and that is not fair.

It will not be cheap and it will not be simple, Gates said, but it has to be done on Indian land across the United States, not just on Seneca land. Gates said he is in Washington a lot on that issue.

"I go to Washington to fight for our Cattaraugus Creek watershed area that affects more than just us," he said. "There's other places out there that are more endangered than us, but we still have to fight for what's ours here in Western New York. There's other places out in Washington State, New Mexico, Savannah River, all these places and it's a little more contamination than we have."

Gates said that radiation will be a human health problem for thousands of years and it is time for a start in digging it all up and finding a new and controlled home.