

TAHLEQUAH, Oklahoma – Late Friday afternoon, a federal judge denied the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s motion to stop the Dakota Access oil pipeline in North Dakota. Just minutes later, the U.S. Department of Justice, Department of the Army and Department of the Interior issued a joint statement announcing a temporary halt to work on the pipeline.

In the statement, the agencies acknowledged "important issues raised by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and other tribal nations." The statement went on to say “The Army will not authorize constructing the Dakota Access pipeline on Corps land bordering or under Lake Oahe until it can determine whether it will need to reconsider any of its previous decisions regarding the Lake Oahe site under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other federal laws. Therefore, construction of the pipeline on Army Corps land bordering or under Lake Oahe will not go forward at this time.”

The agencies continued by saying “Furthermore, this case has highlighted the need for a serious discussion on whether there should be nationwide reform with respect to considering tribes’ views on these types of infrastructure projects. Therefore, this fall, we will invite tribes to formal, government-to-government consultations on two questions: (1) within the existing statutory framework, what should the federal government do to better ensure meaningful tribal input into infrastructure-related reviews and decisions and the protection of tribal lands, resources, and treaty rights; and (2) should new legislation be proposed to Congress to alter that statutory framework and promote those goals.”

In response, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker issued the following statement:

“It’s disappointing that a federal court declined to halt construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which may have severe negative impacts on the Standing Rock Sioux’s main water source, ancient burial sites and other sacred areas,” Baker said. We are grateful this administration, through cooperation with the Department of Justice, Department of the Army and Department of the Interior, have intervened to do what is right in this matter – defend the rights of a sovereign tribal nation to intervene in commercial practices that may harm the Standing Rock people and will most certainly harm the land and sacred sites they have occupied since time immemorial.

“The Standing Rock Sioux are the original inhabitants of what is now North Dakota, and we applaud this administration for recognizing their inalienable right to self-determination of their tribal homelands. While we are troubled this situation even reached this level of contention, we are grateful that it is now sparking meaningful conversations never held at this level of government – conversations that actually take into consideration the needs and wishes of tribes when it comes to infrastructure projects such as the Dakota Access Pipeline.

“We once again congratulate President Obama on his proactive stance toward protecting the people and resources of Indian Country. We also want to recognize the Standing Rock people and Natives from all over the United States who have joined in solidarity for months to halt this dangerous pipeline. We admire their strength and their resolve. The Cherokee Nation will continue to stand with Standing Rock.”