

OURS

Honor reservation's beauty by meeting trash cleanup deadline

THE ISSUE:

June 1 deadline for trash cleanup at reservation dumps

OUR VIEW: The real test of the federal lawsuit's success will be proper maintenance at the waste sites.

We're hopeful that the combination of a court order and a renewed community commitment will clean up a longstanding trash problem at dumps on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

The cleanup is underway now, after the Oglala Sioux Tribe and federal agencies agreed to resolve a decades-old lawsuit over the deplorable condition of 11 waste sites that threatened public health and safety on the reservation. The tribe is under pressure to meet a June 1 deadline to get those dumps cleaned up, and to keep its promise to maintain them once they are.

Jim Leach, the Rapid City attorney who brokered a settlement between his clients and the tribe, plans to monitor progress at all 11 dump sites after June 1. Leach won a consent decree from the federal court that gives plaintiffs the right to monitor not only the initial

cleanup, but to demand that maintenance efforts continue for the next 15 years, if needed. Leach describes himself as a "relative newcomer" to a case that was originally filed in 1985 by the late Mattie Blue Legs. Blue Legs didn't live to see this settlement, but the case was continued by current plaintiffs Margaret Jenkins and Roddy Thompson. But no matter whose name is on the court documents, all reservation residents owe Leach and the plaintiffs a debt of gratitude for their commitment to improving the quality of life on the reservation.

The federal government committed more than \$240,000 to the initial cleanup, but the upkeep and ongoing maintenance of the sites will fall to the tribe, which has agreed to spend up to \$3.5 million to upgrade its trash hauling and handling system.

Cleanup efforts began in late April at the Red Shirt Village

dump, which is the smallest site and also the closest one to Rapid City. Those steps are positive and commendable, but, like Leach, we expect to see the same progress made at dumps reservation-wide by June 1. And the real test of the tribe's commitment will come over time, when it manages to stay out of court by making the long-term effort to keeping the dumps in good working condition.

We hope every Pine Ridge resident will honor Blue Legs' memory with their own commitment to honor the beauty of their reservation: its rolling prairies, its forested ridges and its the other-worldly Badlands landscapes.

Because it's not just about cleaning up today's mess, but about finding the political will to keep the reservation clean for future generations by promoting an anti-littering ethic throughout the reservation.