

PIPELINE: Tesoro conducts roughly 30 spill response drills annually

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deal directly with federally recognized tribes.

“Those were the beginning days of the tribes developing government infrastructure to take over these rights-of-way with the natural gas companies,” said longtime CTUIR attorney Dan Hester. “If there is a problem with the pipeline, we know who to call, and they know who to call.”

The Tesoro line, through the BIA, was granted a permanent easement in 1970, Hester said. The original six-inch line was built in 1950, but has not been used for the past 20 years. Another eight-inch line was built in 1957, running parallel to the first line, which is what carries petroleum products today.

Company spokesman Brendan Smith said spills of any volume are unacceptable, and Tesoro conducts roughly 30 spill response drills annually across the system.

In North Dakota, protesters have raised concerns over the Dakota Access Pipeline potentially spilling crude oil into the Missouri River, which is the reservation’s primary source of drinking water. Energy Transfer Partners is the developer of that project, reaching from the Bakken oil fields into Illinois.

Dave Tovey, executive director for the CTUIR, said Tesoro is “very responsive” and is out performing maintenance work on the line all the time. Meanwhile, though the tribes have inherited the lines, he said they are now in charge of shaping how the companies will compensate landowners and bolster public safety in the event of an emergency.

“Right or wrong, good or bad, we want to build systems to manage (pipelines) and ultimately draw a benefit off of that,” Tovey said. “Instead of bemoaning what happened and what should have happened, you have to take control and manage it. We’ve done as well with



A value station for the Tesoro Logistics petroleum pipeline stands in a field off Cayuse Road east of Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



A warning sign for the Williams natural gas pipeline stands in the edge of a field on the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

that as any tribe in the nation, really.”

For years, that wasn’t the case with the Williams Northwest Pipeline. After the BIA negotiated the original right-of-way in 1955, the CTUIR received less than \$1,000 per year for the next 40 years. The tribes later claimed the payments were “unconscionably low.”

Finally in 1995, the CTUIR negotiated terms for the next 20 years of the Northwest Pipeline right-of-way.

The new agreement brought in more than \$2.6 million, with annual contributions of \$2,000 to the Tribal Scholarship Fund and a total of \$128,961 paid

to landowners for loss of agricultural production.

“It was at that point we said, ‘OK, we’re going to change how these tribal rights-of-way are going to work,’” Hester said.

A chunk of that payment has also gone to the tribal fire, police and ambulance departments.

Pipeline payments have helped to expand staff, buy new equipment and send officers to regional hazardous materials training courses, said Ray Denny, CTUIR public safety director.

“Our budgets are (now) millions of dollars per year,” Denny said.

However, any new projects remain closely

scrutinized by the tribes. The CTUIR was a vocal opponent of the failed Morrow Pacific Project, which aimed to ship 8 million tons of coal annually down the Columbia River where tribal members have treaty fishing rights. Idaho Power was also forced to go around the reservation to site its Boardman to Hemingway transmission line.

“We are much better advocating that some rights-of-way and utilities don’t fit to protect our natural resources and treaty rights,” Sams said.

In that spirit, the CTUIR has stood in support of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline. Tribal chairman Gary Burke wrote in an Aug. 30 letter that the project is a threat to resources and an insult to tribal sovereignty.

“Action that has the potential to cause harm to your land or water resources should have been considered in siting the path of the pipeline,” Burke wrote. “We feel if your sovereign rights are being negatively impacted, it has similar impact on all tribes.”

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UAS: Abling has presided over 100 operations since he started

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Oregon, recommend he apply for the vacant range manager position in Pendleton.

The Pendleton UAS Range had been without a range manager for more than a year after the departure of former manager John Stevens, who became the chief operating officer of SOAR Oregon, an organization that supports the state’s three test ranges.

SOAR Oregon made up for Stevens’ departure by providing Pendleton with a two-year, \$300,000 grant to hire a new manager, which was filled when the city hired Abling in July.

A reminder of Abling’s Northrop Grumman days sits on his desk at his office at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, a model of the unmanned stealth bomber signed by all of his former co-workers.

It’s also a symbol of the experience he now uses every day for his new job, which includes coordinating with the Federal Aviation Administration and acting as the safety manager for all test operations.

“We can’t tolerate an accident,” he said.

Abling said testing has come a long way since Peak 3, the Alaska-based company that managed the range in the past, flew a small quadcopter in a farm field for a few minutes.

Abling said he has presided over 100 operations since he started, and the UAS test range has recently started coordinating unmanned testing with standard flight traffic at the airport.

While many of the companies that come to test at the airport make staff sign a non-disclosure agreement, Abling said 2017 is shaping up to bring in return customers like the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and new ones like Overwatch Imaging, a sensor company from Hood River.

A bigger fish the test range

could land comes courtesy of Airbus, which struck a deal with the SOAR Oregon to begin testing its automated air taxi concept at Tillamook, Warm Springs and Pendleton. Abling said the test range is seeing a steady increase in business because of the easing of federal regulations by the FAA, which gives the range more leeway in running operations for small and medium-sized drones.

“Coming into the commercial world ... it was extremely difficult, just even a couple of years ago, to operate in the national air space,” he said. “What the FAA’s done when they created this range complex is chartered us to do the research as to how to integrate unmanned aircraft into the national airspace, which is what you have to do to have Amazon delivering (packages), Domino’s delivering pizzas.”

Abling said the next step would be for the FAA to start allowing drones to fly outside the visual line of sight of an operator, an important development needed for an unmanned vehicle doing a search-and-rescue operation or delivering a package.

Abling said he loves Pendleton and has no intention of moving back to California, where you don’t get the same distinct seasons that Eastern Oregon provides its residents.

He said that the goal of his tenure with the Pendleton UAS Range is to make it self-sustaining, and he believes it’s well on its way.

The test range is currently assembling a mobile mission control center, which it could lease out to drone companies for testing.

While the test range can’t charge companies to use the airspace, they can lease services like the control center and mission support to help the test range break even.

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