

Seneca Nation begins annual Earth Day event at WVDP



The Cattaraugus Creek Water Walkerz and Onondowaga' Water Protectors, began this year's Earth Day event at the **West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP)**. This annual Earth Day event pays tribute to Mother Earth and brings attention to the importance of protecting the Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie watershed for future generations. The **WVDP** is an appropriate starting point due to its proximity to the Nation Territory and ongoing cleanup efforts to reduce environmental risks.

Walkers from the Seneca Nation, local community, and visitors gathered to participate in a sunrise ceremony to kick-off the event.

"Water is life," Maria Maybee, Seneca Nation tribal member and event coordinator, said.

"It is so important to us as a people, as well as every living thing on Mother Earth. Each step taken today is a prayer for healing of the waters as we come together as one to protect our environment. This event reminds us that we only have one environment; and therefore, it is up to all of us to do our part in protecting it for future generations."

As the sun started to rise, Ms. Maybee asked everyone to make a circle as a symbol of togetherness. Tobacco was distributed to everyone, which was used to communicate one's prayers to the spirits. After the initial prayer, each person in the circle used their own words and prayer to thank Mother Earth for all that she provides. This included prayers for employees at the **WVDP** to be safe as they continue their mission to reduce the legacy risks at the site. A traditional water song welcomed the sun as it rose in the sky shedding its light upon everything that is good.

After the ceremony, participants walked several miles to the overlook bridge where some spread their tobacco and prayers to Mother Earth. The next leg of the water walk was then continued back on the Seneca Territory with a larger group of participants. On Sunday, participants from the Nation and surrounding communities conducted a clean on the Cattaraugus Creek using kayaks and rafts in the water and other volunteers on the shoreline.

"We enjoy the many offerings Mother Earth provides; from the water we drink, the fish, deer, and vegetables we eat. It is important that we protect these natural resources from harm, especially for future generations so they too can benefit from these offerings, Water is Life," Ms. Maybee said.