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Standing Rock Sioux Tribe condemns destruction and desecration of burial grounds by Energy Transfer Partners

CANNON BALL, ND—Sacred places containing ancient burial sites, places of prayer and other significant cultural artifacts of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe were destroyed Saturday by Energy Transfer Partners, Tribal Chairman David Archambault II said.

On Friday, the Tribe filed court documents identifying the area as home to significant Native artifacts and sacred sites.

“This demolition is devastating,” Archambault said. “These grounds are the resting places of our ancestors. The ancient cairns and stone prayer rings there cannot be replaced. In one day, our sacred land has been turned into hollow ground.”

Construction crews removed topsoil across an area about 150 feet wide stretching for two miles, northwest of the confluence of the Cannon Ball and Missouri Rivers.

“I surveyed this land and we confirmed multiple graves and specific prayer sites,” said Tim Mentz, the Standing Rock Sioux’s former tribal historic preservation officer. “Portions, and possibly complete sites, have been taken out entirely.”

Thousands of people from across the United States have joined the Standing Rock Sioux to protest Energy Transfer Partners’ building of the 1,200-mile Dakota Access Pipeline. If built, a half-million barrels of crude oil would pass through the line daily.

The Standing Rock Sioux have filed suit in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to stop construction. The Tribe says it was not properly consulted before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers fast-tracked construction approval.

A decision in that case is expected by Sept. 9.

“We’re days away from getting a resolution on the legal issues, and they came in on a holiday weekend and destroyed the site,” said Jan Hasselman, attorney for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. “What they have done is absolutely outrageous.”

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