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LOCAL

State of New Mexico investigating possible spill reported on Black River near Carlsbad

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Bert Rios first saw "a milky and chocolaty" discharge Sunday morning in the usually clear waters of the Black River near his farm in Malaga.

He said he worried a nearby pipeline owned by Matador Resources, which was being built to run under the river, might have broken and caused the spill of potentially hazardous chemicals into the river.

President of Matador Resources Matt Hairford said the company had no active pipelines in the area, but did have a boring project in the area where pipelines were being drilled and installed.

He said the company was aware of the incident on the Black River and was monitoring closely.

"We're aware of a situation down there, and we're closely monitoring it," he said. "We don't have any active pipelines that go under the river. We have a couple boring projects. There were no hydrocarbons in the pipelines."

Hairford said his company worked closely with state agencies to respond to the reports, and ensure operations are kept safe.

"We'll immediately send people and start to evaluate what may or may not be happening," he said. "We operate in a compliant manner, and take these things very seriously."

On Monday, Rios saw that the operation had continued drilling, so he called the State of New Mexico, in hopes of the regulatory agency ceasing the operation and cleaning up the

possible spill.

"All I saw was that the water was really milky and chocolatey," he said. "I was trying to get some resources out here to at least get it shut down."

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The part of the Black River that could have been exposed to the spill is the last remaining habitat of the Texas hornshell mussel, an endangered mollusk whose population dwindled as the river and its habitat became fractured due to drought and industrial operations.

But Rios said his main concern was his family's safety.

"I just thought that something had to be done," he said. "Our kids go swimming and fishing there during the summer. We'd hate for someone to get sick."

New Mexico Environment Department spokesperson Maddy Hayden said NMED was aware of the incident as of about 4:46 p.m., Monday.

She said NMED was working with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish to respond to the incident.

A conservation officer from Game and Fish was sent to the scene to evaluate the extent of the damage, Hayden said.

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"We are aware of the spill on the Black River and are actively investigating alongside the Department of Game and Fish to determine what occurred and the extent of the spill," Hayden said.

"The Department of Game and Fish has sent a conservation officer to the site and we are awaiting additional details. We are continuing to monitor the situation."

Residents in the area said the pipeline belonged to Matador Resources and was constructed to pass underneath the river.

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A foamy white discharge was reportedly observed in the water.

At the job site where the pipeline was being built, Matador workers referred the matter to Vice President of Regulatory and Environmental Safety Casey Snow.

Snow did not immediately return a request for comment.

This story will be updated.

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