

Talking that Buffalo ban

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By [Mike Masterson](#)

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It was a well-attended session in Harrison the other night, proving yet again that our state's Department of Environmental Quality's (cough) stunningly bad decision in 2012 to permit a hog factory in our sacred Buffalo National River watershed continues to motivate plenty of public attention.

Administrative Law Judge Charles Moulton presided over that Pollution Control and Ecology Commission's public comments hearing to discuss a proposed rule that would ban additional medium- and large-scale hog factories from operating in this sensitive watershed. Such a ban would, however, do nothing to remove the existing C&H Hog Farms from its 6,500-swine operation about six miles upstream from the Buffalo. And therein lies a major rub.

Make no mistake, regardless of what special interests and political arm-twisters intentionally try to misrepresent, the problem here from the git-go has not been with pork or farmers or the hog factory as such. It's been with the factory's location and what many see as the sneaky way our state agency quietly allowed this one quietly into the country's very first national river.

One citizen who has publicly pushed for common sense has been Teresa Turk, a Newton County property owner who attended the Harrison meeting.

"I'd guess there were about 200-250 people there," she told me. "None of the commissioners were present, only a few staff to help with the check-in and meeting coordination. We had some technical issues with the microphones and projector so Bob Cross [of the Ozarks Society] was not able to give his presentation on what Dr. John Van Brahana and his team already have discovered from dye-tracing efforts on the left fork of Big Creek."

Turk showed two photos on her way into the meeting that documented abundant green algae spreading in the creek below the hog factory. The pictures represented what she and others had seen on the left fork of Big Creek, a Buffalo tributary, in early May. "We should not be having algae blooms this early, especially with all the rain and cool temperatures up to now," she said.

"Everyone was polite, but there were definitely two camps that are very serious about their side," Turk said. "Judge Moulton limited the comments to two minutes and most folks stayed within that time period."

She said 19 people spoke for approving the ban. Ten others argued to keep things as they are. "The farmer group said they wanted to wait on the 'science' from the University of Arkansas," said Turk, who lives in Fayetteville but has 100 acres near Mount Judea.

That would be the tax-funded study approved by Gov. Mike Beebe that many are concerned is poorly designed and executed while naturally being politicized and/or influenced by the likes of the factory and its supporter, Cargill.

She said the farmer group also talked about protecting the factory owners' property rights. The other side, apparently unmoved, argued that this was a terribly inappropriate location for a hog factory that affected other property owners because of pollution and degraded air quality in adjacent Mount Judea, resulting in lower resale value, along with a possible reduction in the \$40 million a year tourism business related to the river.

And so the beat goes on, valued readers. If you haven't made your voice heard on the matter that affects our entire state, I'd encourage you to contact the Pollution Control and Ecology Commission and the Department of Environmental Quality, as well as the governor, to express your feelings.

Deserving high praise

As public awareness and outrage has swelled in the past year over this hog factory as well as SWEPCO's request to run a 51-mile-long power line through portions of Benton and Carroll counties, I've been negligent by not adequately recognizing the valiant efforts of concerned individuals and nonprofit activist groups to bring common sense to bear on each of these unrelated matters.

These volunteer warriors risk political backwash without asking for a penny (often even spending their own money), and raise funds through car washes, bake sales and selling t-shirts and bumper stickers to continue their determination to help maintain our quality of life in the Ozarks.

Yet I have yet to see or hear our elected legislators praise those committed to each issue for their dedication to protecting and preserving our natural treasures. Why is that? Special interests with big dollars to contribute got the public servants' tongues, perhaps? It's a safe bet they aren't spending their own savings to speak for the forests and clear streams that characterize our beloved Ozarks.

So today I'll give an enthusiastic standing ovation and sustained applause to members of groups such as the Ozarks Society, Save the Ozarks, Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, Ozark River Stewards, Sierra Club, Arkansas Canoe Club, Friends of the Rivers, National Parks Conservation Association, and residents of Garfield, Eureka Springs and Beaver, all of which would be affected by the enormous 345-kilovolt line that would require cutting a 150-foot-wide swath through the forests.

And, of course, kudos yet again to "apolitical" Dr. Brahana, who with his group has for months been voluntarily testing water quality on his own time and nickel around the hog factory simply because it's the right thing to do.

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