

March 10, 2017

Letter Concerning C & H Hog Farm: Please halt Permit 5264 W

I went to the public hearing in Jasper on Tuesday, March 7th. I was not one of the speakers. I had earlier written to A.D.E.Q. that I was against extending the C & H rights to spread hog manure around yet more area fields. But today I felt compelled to write a second letter after the meeting. I wanted to share some of what I learned and also dig deeper into my feelings about the situation.

I have lived here near the river since the mid-70's. I kayak and swim in the river often. I live on a tributary of the river, alongside a creek. I have watched the creek go from being drinkable water in the early 80's, to watching bubbles pile up in the rapids at times, and this year green slime has started to pool on top of the water a bit. Our home's water is from a well, which is 100' under the ground near the creek. So water quality is a concern when it comes to my family's health too.

I worry that our areas growth, everything from rental cabins to retirement homes, from chicken houses to hogs running wild, has caused our Buffalo River watershed to reach a tipping point. Why is this permit expansion being considered at a time when not only is there supposed to be a moratorium on any new pig farms, but the permit for C & H Farm was supposed to run out in October of 2015? A CAFO is not a farm, it is a point-source major polluter. This CAFO is equivalent to a new mid-size city along the Buffalo, one without a sewage treatment plant. So far C&H is ruled "safe for the environment" simply because leakage and field spreading of manure has not built up enough to show damage yet. We don't want to proceed to the next logical step which would be a green light for even more CAFO's that supposedly "do not degrade our area's water" to be built near the Buffalo River watershed.

In the newspaper today it quoted Mr. Osborn's opening comment that "impaired waters are beyond the scope and purposes of this evenings hearing." If water quality isn't what the meeting was about, thus, not the issue to be discussed, I seem to be confused on what the issue is? Is this the "double-talk" from A.D.E.Q. That one speaker referenced? Is it not common sense that a CAFO is a point-source of sewage-like pollutants, very different from rural farms with cattle or dry chicken house litter?

We are at the beginning of a new era for water management along the river since it is starting to degrade at a more noticable rate. Since the river is changing then rules and regulations that weren't necessary before are now needed to more closely regulate the water and halt or reverse any noted drop in water quality. There needs to be a publicly known defined limit of what amount of nitrates etc. are allowable, and assurances that if the level is reached certain steps will be taken to halt and reverse the pollution.

Last night at the public meeting I heard studies reported by ADEQ that showed that C & H has not polluted the watershed (yet), thus was perfectly safe. It was shown that in fact, the

farm was built to higher standards than necessary. Conflicting studies were noted by environmental groups that show that that C & H is hugely adversely affecting Big Creek and the Buffalo River. One speaker mentioned that 'both parties could be happy' by having both the farms and the water quality up to safe water standards. I liked that answer best. I think the Henson's who own the hog farm would like that as well.

Another thing that surprised me at the public meeting was that one person mentioned that the park designation could even be dropped if the quality of the river no longer met the standards to be a park. What a thought, that we could lose the park! Why that might be just what the CAFO's corporations would like, to not have to worry about stringent national park water regulations any more so they could build even more CAFO's.

At the meeting I learned that in other places often pig manure is injected into the ground, because that method is more ideal as it halts airborne pathogens. I also learned that pig sludge can not be put on fields that have a 8 – 15% or greater slope, as it will run off too much. Earlier I learned that chicken litter is different, it is dry. Pig sludge is like human sewage.

Sludge running out in the open running off fields and down to the river all year - we were already worried about accidental storm overflow or slow/fast karst leakage, but adding even more open fields with sludge draining 24/7 towards the Buffalo River watershed makes the problem even worse. I also learned that in a flat area the sludge pollution only moves about 10' a year, which I would assume gives it time to season and weaken and diffuse. Whereas in a hilly area the sludge moves 2,000' every (I didn't catch how often, a week, a month, a year?) This means that Big Creek, next to C & H Farms and six miles upstream from the Buffalo, is nothing but a pipe line to send the sludge quickly to the river. I don't know how they will find flat fields like that in this area!

Why isn't the Buffalo River National Park a major part of this conversation? No one is noting that they are already protecting the water quality in the river. Their public silence and lack of comment for newspaper articles sends a silent message to the public. It makes it seem that the environmentalists are simply stretching the issue out of proportion. But things aren't fine because the park has been having to put up signs at the confluence of Mill Creek and Big Creek as they enter the Buffalo? Shouldn't that tell us something? The park superintendent Kevin Cheri was present at the public meeting but did not speak out. Perhaps the park has written a comment and submitted it and felt that was enough as they do not want to alienate local farmers who live in the area.

But finally, after all is said and done, while scientists battle about test results and put off stating what the cut-off standard is where pollution is unacceptable. I would like to talk about the things that can't be measured.

Our Buffalo River National Park has it's own Leonardo Da Vinci, he is watercolor artist Bill McNamara, who paints incredibly beautiful scenes of the Buffalo River region. Our area has it's own Ansel Adams (famed B & W photographer of American

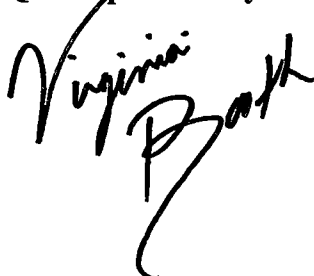
Western scenes) in our noted nature photographer Tim Ernst. Both artists' 2-D visual work celebrates the natural wonders of the Buffalo River. Beauty like this can't be measured. Images of the Buffalo River help sell this state as the Natural State. Images by both these artists are displayed in hospitals, McDonalds, public colleges, bank presidents offices, and in homes and in coffee table books across the state and around the world. To lose any part of this beauty would be a tragedy.

And finally, in the category of things that can't be measured, picture a little boy or little girl jumping into clean water, so clean the water is blueish green. Perhaps they are jumping from a rope swing or off of a low bluff. Picture youngsters squealing as they float in the current through a rapids. Picture a young couple with a new baby, holding the baby up in the warm water as they soak on a summer day. Or perhaps they were a young teen, testing their bravery running rapids in a kayak or canoe. Picture all of the older people in the river remembering those treasured moments of their life when they were that youngster, child or baby. Or perhaps this person is now middle aged or elderly and swimming allows them to move their joints in the water more freely than they can move on land. The local farmers as well as the environmentalists all would agree that memories on the river are part of what makes a life worth living and would never want to deny that to others, even if they themselves do not swim or run rapids. To me and to many others, that's what this fight to save the clean water in the Buffalo is all about: our emotions, our memories, and beauty.

We citizens, along with our government agencies, must protect our national treasures. Yosemite is a treasure. The Grand Canyon is a treasure. Yellowstone is a treasure. We must protect these places as they are uniquely beautiful and they are irreplaceable. We must protect the water quality of the Buffalo National River. Our clean water, combined with scenic bluffs and wilderness areas, these qualities are like no other river system in the United States. We must protect the river for future generations. It won't be easy.

The river was preserved once when the land was forcibly taken by the government to become a National Park. That was to stop it from being built up so that the public had a right to enjoy it. Now there is another fight to save the river for public use, a fight to preserve the water from pollution. This fight was inevitable due to population growth and larger farms.

The C&H CAFO could be closed and moved. Regulations can be put in place now stating there will be no more CAFO's within a certain distance of the Buffalo River watershed. Any within range should be required to have it's massive sewage treated (which would probably be cost prohibitive). I hope you come to the conclusion that area farms be legally obligated to protect the water in this national river at a higher level than for other areas. Solutions must be found while they are still relatively inexpensive to fix. We should not ignore the problem. We should not let it grow. We should not be forced to lower standards and allow swimmers to be immersed in polluted water. It is ADEQ's responsibility to insure the environmental quality of the Buffalo River.



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