

PRESS RELEASE

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Arkansas Groups Vigorously Oppose “No Significant Impact” Finding for Industrial Hog Facility in Buffalo River Watershed

Buffalo River Coalition says federal agencies “missed the boat” on scientific evidence

Little Rock, Arkansas – The Small Business Administration (SBA) and the USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) made public their final “finding of no significant impact” (FONSI) today regarding an ill-placed and unprecedented 6500-swine facility just six miles upstream from the Buffalo National River. The Buffalo River Coalition, which includes the Ozark Society, the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, the Arkansas Canoe Club, and the National Parks Conservation Association, vigorously opposes the finding and the presence of C&H Hog Farms next to America’s first national river, Arkansas’ crown jewel, and one of the state’s major tourist destinations. The Coalition, backed by solid facts and science, alerted the federal agencies to the many potential adverse environmental and economic impacts to the region and the state of Arkansas, but the final FONSI ignored all of that information.

Perhaps the biggest flaw in the no impact finding is the conclusion that the water quality of the Buffalo River will not be significantly affected. The federal agencies based this conclusion on inaccurate information and analysis that the swine facility site does not exhibit karst geography, turning a blind eye to the overwhelming scientific consensus and the comments of the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to the contrary. In fact, the Coalition alerted the federal agencies that the authors of an Oklahoma State University study, which the agencies misinterpret as supporting their faulty determination, have in fact found a “major fracture and movement of waste” underneath the site. But the final no impact finding entirely overlooks this critical information.

The final FONSI rehashes the federal agencies’ long-standing and untenable denial of the facility’s potential impacts on water and air quality, public health and the health of the children who attend school next to C&H’s operations, endangered or threatened species, the general quality of life of local communities, and the almost certain pollution of the nearby Buffalo National River.

“The conclusion that C&H is not located on karst and that groundwater and surface water contamination is not imminent is absolutely based on flawed science,” said **nationally recognized karst expert Dr. John Van Brahana**. “The data collected over the past two years by my team and submitted to the agencies puts the likelihood of swine waste from C&H Hog Farms finding its way into the Buffalo National River at 95 percent. This data was completely ignored, as were similar comments from noted hydrogeologist Thomas Aley and the opinions of the National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey. We have all concluded that the C&H swine operation may have significant adverse impacts, which requires that a full Environmental Impact Statement be prepared.”

The swine facility could devastate the tourism industry that is the lifeblood of Newton County and the surrounding area. The Buffalo National River relies on clear waters and a pristine environment to attract tourists to enjoy recreational activities such as swimming, kayaking, and blue-ribbon fishing. In fact, over 1.3 million people visited the Buffalo National River in 2014 and contributed \$65 million to the local economy. By disputing that seepage of swine waste collected in C&H's two waste storage ponds and sprayed onto fields will enter a karst system and ultimately flow into the Buffalo National River, the final FONSI erroneously downplays the potential impact of C&H on Arkansas's tourism economy.

"People swim, fish, and paddle in the Buffalo River, and may be subject to contact with untreated swine waste. The well water that people drink may become affected," said **Dane Schumacher, Buffalo River Watershed Alliance Board member**. "By denying the scientific evidence of karst beneath the C&H operations, SBA and FSA have opened the doors for a wide range of water quality issues likely to be ahead of us. Our coalition remains very concerned about the unprecedented number of pigs, and the amount of pig waste, that has entered the Buffalo River Watershed."

"With this FONSI, the agencies have failed to meet their obligations under the law," said **Hannah Chang, attorney with Earthjustice**, the public interest environmental law firm that represented the Coalition in court and on the comments. "The likelihood of significant environmental harm to America's first national river mandates a full Environmental Impact Statement, not a finding of no impact that ignores clear data and hard science. With so much at risk, we are compelled to consider our next options for legal action."

[Link to Final SIGNED Finding Of No Significant Impact \(FONSI\):](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/Conservation/PDF/Final%20SIGNED%20Finding%20Of%20No%20Significant%20Impact%20(FONSI)_CH%20Hog%20Farm_20160224.pdf)

[http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/Conservation/PDF/Final%20SIGNED%20Finding%20Of%20No%20Significant%20Impact%20\(FONSI\)_CH%20Hog%20Farm_20160224.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/Conservation/PDF/Final%20SIGNED%20Finding%20Of%20No%20Significant%20Impact%20(FONSI)_CH%20Hog%20Farm_20160224.pdf)

BACKGROUND

The final FONSI follows a second Environmental Assessment from SBA and FSA ordered by a federal judge, who found in a lawsuit filed by the Buffalo River Coalition that the agencies had failed to adequately consider C&H Hog Farms' impacts on the environment. The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas ruled on December 2, 2014 that the loan guarantees to C&H were issued without an adequate environmental assessment, violating both the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, and ordered the agencies to take a second look at C&H's environmental impacts.

But the agencies' second try repeated the initial and unlawful "finding of no significant impact" (FONSI) about C&H's impacts. The most recent public comment period for the final Environmental Assessment and draft FONSI ended January 29, 2016.

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