

PRESS RELEASE

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New Scientific Evidence of Substantial Hog Waste Leakage Under C&H Hog Farms Surfaces

Findings delivered to Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission

Jasper, Arkansas – New and critical scientific information about the possible release of contamination from hog waste beneath the C&H Hog Farms industrial facility in Mount Judea, Arkansas was recently brought to light at an April 29 meeting of the Commissioners of the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission (APCEC). The information comes from a study conducted in March 2015 that shows a major fissure and movement of waste under the waste lagoons at C&H Hog Farms, a progression that has now likely been ongoing for over one year. The presence of the ill-placed concentrated animal feeding operation housing 6500 swine next to the Buffalo National River has been hotly contested by members of the Buffalo River Coalition, concerned Arkansans and many out-of-state visitors who enjoy the pristine waters of Arkansas's crown jewel.

“It will be a sad day if what appears to be a substantial discharge of swine waste into groundwater proves to be true and that state agencies and the public were not informed,” said Gordon Watkins, President of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance. “It’s a damn shame that, in spite of ongoing warnings from the public, damage must be done before those in charge of protecting our state resources will take notice.”

The study, completed by Oklahoma State University in collaboration with the Big Creek Research and Extension Team (BCRET), involves Electrical Resistivity images recorded at depths of more than 100 feet below the ground. The Electrical Resistivity Imaging (ERI) technology laid bare geological structures in the substrate, such as possible fractures, flow paths, and bedrock. Emails obtained by the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance (BRWA) under the Freedom of Information Act in October revealed that members of the state-funded study by BCRET were fairly confident that a “major fracture and movement of waste” beneath the ponds was suggested by the data. Understandably alarmed, BRWA requested and received the raw technical data collected during the ERI testing.

“Reading those emails raised all kinds of flags for us,” said Buffalo River Watershed Alliance Board member Dane Schumacher. “With Arkansas’s crown jewel at stake, why was this information unavailable to the public for a year?”

To clarify the magnitude and meaning of the evidence, independent opinions from two expert geologists were sought. Dr. Christopher Liner, a geophysicist at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville concluded that “the holding pond data implies ground water contamination to a

depth of at least 120 ft., most logically from leakage of the hog manure storage ponds.” Mr. Thomas Aley, a noted hydrogeologist specializing in natural resource management of karst (porous underground) regions, concurred saying that “the data strongly suggest that there is appreciable leakage downward out of the manure ponds. Such leakage not only introduces pollutants into the groundwater system but in this karst setting may also lead to subsidence or collapse of the ponds.”

“It is certainly alarming that swine waste may have been leaking into the ground and groundwater to a depth of 120’ or more, with little or no filtration, for more than a year,” said Jack Stewart, Vice President of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance. “It is doubly alarming that this potentially disastrous discharge of waste was not brought to the attention of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) or the Commission, until private citizens uncovered the information and made it public.”

In comments made at the APCEC meeting, former U.S. Congressman Ed Bethune said: “Taxpayers were assured that the research would be independent and that the goal was to protect the public interest... Now... we learn that the director of ADEQ and the PC&E Commission were not told about the OSU findings.... In my experience, bureaucracies are unwilling to divulge findings and information that is contrary to the outcome they prefer.... There should be an effort to find out who knew what and when did they know it.”

The permit granted by ADEQ in 2012 to C&H Hog Farms allows for some amount of waste leakage from the waste storage ponds, but the permit was issued with no consideration given to the possible existence of porous karst that allows direct transmission of any leakage into the groundwater, springs and ultimately into the Buffalo River. In fact, environmental assessments that enabled the permit were based on the conclusion that the swine facility site does not exhibit karst hydrogeology, a conclusion that turns a blind eye to the overwhelming scientific consensus and comments of the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to the contrary.

The BRWA has contended from the outset that a thorough environmental assessment of the facility would have confirmed what professional geologists have stated: fractured and porous limestone formations underlie the entire Ozark Plateau, which includes the Mount Judea area. In light of the new evidence of underground hog waste leakage, the Buffalo River Coalition -- which includes the Ozark Society, the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, the Arkansas Canoe Club, and the National Parks Conservation Association -- is asking that C&H Hog Farms operations are halted until an investigation can evaluate possible damage or risk of damage. In addition, the Coalition requests that BCRET be instructed to promptly and fully disclose to ADEQ and the public any and all evidence that it may now or in the future have of any release or potential for release from the facility.

“We are looking for APCEC and ADEQ to take prompt action, order a thorough investigation, and ensure that corrective and protective measures are implemented before further damage is done,” said Buffalo River Watershed Alliance Board member Ginny Masullo. “The health of the Buffalo National River and certainly Arkansas citizens should benefit from the highest levels of protection. Anything less is just plain negligence.”

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