

Via Email

C&H Hog Farms EA

c/o Cardno, Inc.

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Re: Comments on FSA and SBA Final Environmental Assessment and

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact, C&H Hog Farms

Dear Administrator Dolcini and Administrator Contreras-Sweet,

The FSA and SBA Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact, C&H Hog Farms that your agencies have proposed is first of all a waste of taxpayer dollars. Your efforts to obscure the accessible scientific record and data that are available to ascertain that C&H is situated in a karst hydrogeology landform are truly remarkable.

The selective use of available data is enough to disqualify this FEA from objective reliability for use by the FSA/SBA agencies to determine the results at which you have arrived. This particular CAFO (C&H) and its effects on its Buffalo National River (BNR) watershed have been studied recently by four research teams: Many tax dollars and volunteer hours have been dedicated to portraying a real look at this issue. The National Park Service, NPS, (which has requested that the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, ADEQ, add Big Creek to the "Impaired waterway" status), the Division of Agriculture of the University of Arkansas Big Creek Research and Extension Team, BCRET, (which has no professional hydrogeologist on its team and has limited itself to studying surface runoff), the Karst Hydrogeology of the Buffalo National River team, KHBNR, (which is led by an internationally recognized hydro-geologist and is studying karst surface/groundwater interactions), and the United States Geological Service, USGS, (which has found evidence of doline sinkhole features and a major fracture at the site.)

If this EA looks closely, taking a hard and thorough look, at the all scientific information available for its final EA, it will acknowledge that its FEA is flawed because it does not recognize the most important premise upon which all of the previous studies should have been based: the effects of swine waste on a watershed

characterized by its karst features. The reason it is riddled with karst is because it is karst. It is impossible to set a building or a field on a non-karst landscape underlain by karst geology. Karst is the type of geology by which the entire Ozark Plateau dome is recognized and categorized. To question this scientific classification is equivalent to portraying the earth as flat because our eyes are too limited to discern the curve of the horizon. Every scientific document on the geology of the Ozarks agrees. Every field observation and survey agrees (except the “geotechnical” survey that explored the clay in order to build the C&H swine waste lagoons.) That team had no geologists or hydro-geologists on it, yet the FEA cites it as its authority that no karst exists where C&H is located. Before publishing the final EA, I request that the agencies study the works of international professional hydro-geologist Tom Aley, international professional hydro-geologist Dr. Van Brahana, the USGS electrical resistivity test results from Oklahoma State University, and any geology textbook or paper written in the last fifty years that includes the Ozarks, especially the Newton County area of Mt. Judea. Everyone agrees. We live in a karst geological watershed. Even our drinking water from our wells is saturated with the lime from dissolved limestone. Our faucets and hot water heaters harden as the calcium precipitates out over time. We live in karst above and below the ground.

I can only surmise that a hasty and superficial look was taken to arrive at the FEA conclusions. This is not what Judge Marshall requested. This oversight by itself requires that an Environmental Impact Statement, EIS, be performed.

Besides the omission of the elephant in the room, the karst hydrogeology of the watershed, this FEA has also neglected to take a hard look at the endangered and threatened species, protected by the Endangered Species Act, ESA, located in the Big Creek/Buffalo River watershed. An alarm spanning the nation has been raised concerning the White Nose Syndrome disease, WNS, upon our bats, especially in the second, third and fourth years after they have first contracted it. Neither the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, USFWS, nor the FEA took a hard look at the recent studies of the cumulative and devastating effects this disease is having on our endangered and threatened species of bats in the watershed. In 2014 WNS was first documented to have spread to the bats here. When Gray bats that forage for sustenance over six miles along creeks and rivers find fewer of the macro-invertebrate species like Mayflies and Caddis flies upon which they rely for their diet because of the impaired water quality of their Big Creek habitat, their health is weakened. When WNS then appears and adds to the assault, they are threatened further. This is a prime example of cumulative damage. The FEA has not taken a hard look at the literature readily available on this growing menace threatening the survival of Gray, Long-eared and Indiana bats that reside in the Big Creek watershed. (See the references to the available research on this in the Earth Justice comments presented on behalf of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, the Ozark Society, the Arkansas Canoe Club, and the National Parks Conservation Association.

It is because of this slipshod approach and disregard of available scientific literature that the FEA has failed to take a hard look at the effects of the C&H operation on the

Buffalo River watershed. I must ask that a full EIS be required of the SBA/FSA. If we have committed our tax dollars in the form of contracting such a “hard look” assessment, then the agencies need to diligently perform that work. I see no evidence of this in the “copy, cut and paste” document I read. In its FONSI statements for the various concerns raised in the FEA, the response was that a NMP exists. Since when does depending on a Nutrient Management Plan, NMP, suggest that compliance and “no harm” have occurred? That could be compared to reading a syllabus for a college class, and determining that every student will pass the course without proving their competence through tests and research projects. NMPs are a necessary part of making sure that a CAFO complies with requirements, but unless we also know the effects that applying that plan has on the surface and underlying ground waters it affects, we can’t know the true results. That is why the FEA must examine all relevant research and tests that have been performed.

For all of these reasons, as well as the most essential of all, that we must weigh in on the side of preserving and conserving this beautiful Buffalo National River, I ask that an Environmental Impact Statement, EIS, be required to consider the real extent of impairment to water and wildlife that the C&H CAFO is doing and can continue do without an impartial assessment. A real hard look must be taken now.

Will you please respond to let me know that you have received my comments?

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Marti Olesen