

Mill Canyon residents organize to protect air and water

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<http://thefigtree.org/sept17/090117millcanyonprotects.html>

Concerned about proposals to spread municipal sewage sludge, called “bio-solids,” on nearby farm land, residents and farmers in Mill Canyon, 35 miles west of Spokane, have organized Protect Mill Canyon Watershed to protect the area’s air, and its drinking and irrigation water.

“Scientists are divided on the safety,” said canyon resident and landowner Morton Alexander, “but the state Department of Ecology (DOE) only thinly regulates it. We can’t just sit by as sewage from unknown sources, with unknown contaminants, is trucked in and dumped here.”

Residents are organizing because one farm seeks a DOE permit to apply bio-solids to its grain fields above the canyon and its waterways.

Residents tend commercial and amateur organic farms and gardens. Some have been organic for more than 50 years.

Tolstoy Farm, one of the region’s oldest organic farms, supplies produce to hundreds of customers in Spokane and Davenport. Certified organic for nearly 20 years, it helped create the Spokane Farmer’s Market and was early in introducing fresh, local, organic produce to Spokane, said Morton.

Its irrigation source is not downstream from the farm seeking to use bio-solids, but they are concerned about the effect to neighbors’ land and water.

“No farm exists in a bubble,” said Tolstoy organic farmer Timothy Pellow. “The national organic regulations say an organic farmer is responsible for all materials applied to our fields.

“Our commitment to healthy organic land stewardship makes our business thrive,” he said. “It is important to our customers that our soils and food not be contaminated by us or others.”

Sierra Club, Columbia Institute for Water Policy, Northwest Fund for the Environment support the Mill Canyon neighbors as they challenge the DOE not to grant a permit.

“If the permit is denied, it will set a precedent to protect other rural communities,” said Morton.

For information, call 624-6855, email farmchrys@gmail.com or visit protectmillioncanyon.org.