

PRESS RELEASE

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Citizens' Group Reports Victory in Battle Against Sewage Sludge

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Davenport, WA

An informal committee of neighbors in the Mill Canyon area northeast of Davenport, WA is calling it a victory: They didn't want sewage sludge to be applied to agricultural lands in their watershed. They fought hard against it. Now, due to their efforts, sludge will not be applied to lands immediately adjacent to the canyon where they live, according to a newly approved permit, issued December 13th by the Department of Ecology.

The scale of the win for the committee is significant. The total acreage that will have sludge applied is reduced from the original 887.45 acres to 157.77 acres in the final permit. The original application indicated sewage sludge would have been applied less than one mile from Mill Canyon residents' farms, gardens and wells and less than half a mile from the source of a private spring used for drinking water that figured prominently in comments sent to the Department of Ecology citing concerns over potential contamination from the sludge. With the approved permit, the closest to the canyon any sludge will be applied is over 5 miles away.

For close to two years, the citizens fought the permits sought by Fire Mountain Farms of Onalaska, WA. Fire Mountain Farms is a company with a checkered reputation that offers to apply sewage sludge on farms at no cost to the farmer (the company is paid by sewage treatment plants to take the sludge away). Concerned Mill Canyon residents met with their neighbors and testified at public hearings. They wrote letters and generated publicity that raised public awareness about the risks of applying sewage sludge to farmland.

In the spring of 2017, when it looked like the permits to dump the sludge were all but destined to be approved, the neighbors stepped up their opposition efforts. They named their informal committee "Protect Mill Canyon Watershed." They announced their intention to appeal in the case of an adverse decision and launched a detailed website laying out their position. They initiated a statewide letter-writing campaign that helped garner support for their position and put pressure on the Department of Ecology. The committee also received valuable guidance, advice and support from the Columbia Institute for Water Policy, the Northwest Fund for the Environment, Safe Food and Fertilizer (a project of Earth Island Institute) and the Sierra Club.

Ultimately, it was one-on-one negotiations between neighbors that achieved the compromise reducing the acreage and proximity of sludge application. As the deadline for a decision on the permit from Ecology approached, representatives from Protect Mill Canyon Watershed met and corresponded with the grain farmer who was seeking to have the sludge applied to his lands. Despite urgings from the Department of Ecology and the sludge applicator that the original provisions should be defended in administrative court, the farmer ultimately decided that being a good neighbor was most important and agreed to withdraw from applying sludge close to Mill Canyon.

Morton Alexander, a landowner whose spring was at risk commented, “We refused to just lie down and accept this threat to our beautiful canyon, its air and water. We are grateful for support from the larger community, regional and statewide, that brought credibility to our fight. Hopefully, our success inspires resistance by others in similar struggles.”

Protect Mill Canyon Watershed is an informal committee of Mill Canyon residents.

Committee members: Morton Alexander, Corrina Barrett, Ernest Barrett, Laura Harris, Paige Kenney, Chrys Ostrander and Timothy Pellow. Jill Herrera, Grant Writer; Rachael Paschal Osborn, Columbia Institute for Water Policy, Legal Adviser; Donald Hanson, Science Adviser; Patricia Martin, Safe Food and Fertilizer, Technical Adviser.

Links:

- Protect Mill Canyon Watershed website: <http://www.protectmillcanyon.org/>
- Final Permit from Ecology, [Site-specific Land Application Plan for Fire Mountain Farms - Rosman Farms Unit](#)
- Protect Mill Canyon Watershed maintains the position that sewage sludge should never be released into the environment and that the practice of applying sewage sludge to agricultural and forest lands in Washington should be ended. Protect Mill Canyon Watershed advocates for a [statewide moratorium on future permits for the land application of sewage sludge](#).

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