

# Electronic Filing: Received, Clerk's Office 08/17/2020 P.C. #25

Date: August 17, 2020

Re: First Hearing – Illinois Pollution Control Board  
Written Comments on Rulemaking for Coal Ash

Our names are Michael Camp and Kristin Camp and we are writing as concerned citizens directly affected by coal ash. We are lifelong residents of Vermilion County, Illinois, and live approximately two miles from the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River. A coal-fired power plant operated there from 1955 through 2011, dumping coal ash in three ash pits – all located in the floodplain of the Middle Fork River, Illinois' only National Scenic River. The site presents three major issues:

- 1) ongoing pollution of groundwater that runs beneath the pits;
- 2) direct pollution of the Middle Fork River through seeps hydrologically connected to the buried coal ash; and
- 3) the risk of a catastrophic breach, where massive amounts of coal ash could inundate the Middle Fork River.

As avid hikers, canoeists, fisherman, and naturalists, we know the river and its floodplain intimately. While canoeing, we have witnessed the coal ash pollution seeping into the river for many years. During the last month we have taken two kayak and canoe trips down the Middle Fork River with our siblings, daughter and grandchildren. While floating along we encountered a sampling of the wildlife that dwell along the river: cliff swallows, Great Blue Herons, Eagles, turtles, snakes, numerous schools of fish, frogs and toads, and dragonflies. Kristin and our grandchildren can spend hours on sand/gravel bars searching for fossils and skipping rocks. While we thoroughly enjoy kayaking on the Middle Fork River, we take care not to touch the water or get out of the kayaks anywhere near the seeps by the coal ash pits or directly downstream. If the coal ash is allowed to remain in these pits, the situation will only get worse. We have also observed how the river has meandered toward the coal ash pits at an alarming rate. There is an ever-looming threat of a catastrophic breach along this stretch of the river during a flood event.

Not only have we shared the joys of the river with my family and friends, but as a lifelong formal educator, Kristin has taken thousands of students on field trips to the river and the woodland along its floodplain. For example, as the Science Curriculum Coordinator for nearby Champaign School District, Kristin collaborated with staff from the Illinois Geological Survey to design and implement a geology unit that incorporated a field trip to Kickapoo State Park and the Middle Fork River. For six years all 800 fifth grade students went on this field trip and observed the results of the glacial events that shaped the landscape, and got the opportunity to discover for themselves the joy of exploring a gravel bar while experiencing how erosion shapes the river. Kristin still has students and teachers express how deeply that field trip has influenced them. How much coal ash pollution can we allow to seep into the river before students can no longer enjoy field trips there?

We have cited these examples to demonstrate the importance of the Middle Fork River to us personally and to the greater community, and to emphasize the critical situation coal ash has presented to the health of our river. In addition, coal ash pollution is seeping into the groundwater, and many of the local residents get our drinking water from personal wells. Two of the largest sources of economic income for Vermilion County are agriculture and the parks and natural areas in the Vermilion River corridor. If a breach would occur along the coal ash pits, tons of coal ash pollution would spill into the river and flow downstream through most of the parks, the city of Danville, and on into Indiana. This would be catastrophic not only to the ecosystem of the river floodplain, but the Vermilion County economy.

*We expect the Illinois Pollution Control Board to provide strong coal ash rules that protect all the people of Illinois from coal ash pollution **IN PERPETUITY**. Particularly, the rules must ensure that coal ash, wherever it is stored, does not get wet either now or in the future, that coal ash cannot be closed-in-place if*

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*ash is or will remain wet, and that the requirements for cleaning up groundwater pollution must be clear that clean up will not be treated as complete until ash is no longer exposed to water.*

This is our opportunity for Illinois to be a **LEADER** in the nation and **MODEL** the pathway for protection from coal ash pollution. This is not a political issue, both Democrats and Republicans voted SB9 into law in both the Illinois House and the Senate. This is a **HUMANITARIAN and ENVIRONMENTAL** issue. **This is our chance to do the right thing**, and our lawmakers understood that. We are asking that the Illinois Pollution Control Board, write strong coal ash rules to do just that.

Sincerely,

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