

## Opinion: DES says its consideration of the GSL landfill will include environmental justice



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Thanks to the Concord Monitor and other New Hampshire media outlets there's been good coverage of the GSL landfill controversy. But now there is an important new wrinkle: New Hampshire's environmental regulators (DES) have made public that they will condition permits for Casella's GSL project on its consistency with federal and state environmental justice concerns.

For five years, Casella has been telling DES and everyone else that the sky is falling: with the forced closure of their NCES landfill in Bethlehem, failure to issue permits (and soon!) for GSL will cause New Hampshire to run out of landfill capacity. And the result will be skyrocketing waste disposal costs for communities across the state.

That, of course, has been shown to be a total red herring. A number of the communities that once landfilled their municipal waste at NCES have already gone elsewhere, generally at lower cost. And DES finally has made clear that even under the most dire assumptions the state will have enough landfill capacity until 2034. And under realistic assumptions, New Hampshire's landfill capacity should last for decades beyond 2034. As one New Hampshire state representative recently stated clearly, New Hampshire doesn't have a capacity problem; it's Casella that has the capacity problem!

Nevertheless, given its army of lawyers and lobbyists, Casella still finds willing ears in New Hampshire's government. Governor Sununu, who never met a big engineering project he didn't support (including the grossly expensive Seabrook nuclear plant and the ill-conceived Northern Pass transmission project) seems in the tank for whatever Casella wants. And recently a New Hampshire state senator made the hysterical argument that if New Hampshire doesn't allow Casella to build this new unneeded landfill no company will ever do business in New Hampshire again. Really, Sen. Avard?

On the other side is a coalition of grassroots organizations that right from the start has argued that Casella wants to build the GSL landfill not out of need, but out of greed. The GSL project was never designed to serve New Hampshire's interests; it was designed to serve Casella's interests.

In addition to it being the wrong time for GSL, it's also the wrong place. The Dalton site is essentially in the middle of a sand and gravel pit, which hydrogeologists and soil scientists say is too permeable, risks groundwater contamination, and is therefore just about the worst possible place to locate a landfill. And it's not like there is no suitable place to put a landfill in New Hampshire when one is needed. Mapping done by DES shows that only about 15% of state land, including the Dalton site, is unsuitable for landfill development.

Why then did Casella pick the Dalton site? By their own admission, Casella locked in on Dalton for a number of profit-related factors, including the fact that as a poor community, Dalton has a limited tax base that would allow Casella to buy off Dalton as the host community relatively cheaply. And it didn't hurt that Dalton was one of only 14 towns in New Hampshire without a zoning ordinance, making it much easier for Casella to get whatever it wanted in terms of town approvals.

But that's not the only environmental justice issue that DES needs to consider. Other broad considerations include:

**Rich States-Poor State.** The GSL project quite simply means shipping solid waste from rich states to a poorer state. This increases environmental risks for New Hampshire, and allows richer states such as Massachusetts to continue to avoid dealing with their own solid waste problems. It also results in increased truck traffic and associated pollution for all of the communities along the long-haul truck routes.

**Rich Region-Poor Region.** The North Country has historically been the forgotten part of New Hampshire, that is until it comes time for the state to locate facilities that communities generally don't want. New Hampshire's North Country already has two of the three commercial landfills in the state, and allowing Casella to build GSL in Dalton, only about 5 miles from Casella's NCES landfill in Bethlehem, would result in a doubling-up on the risk of contamination to public water supplies in the Ammonoosuc River watershed.

**Rich Towns-Poor Towns.** Of the in-state trash that will be shipped to GSL, the vast majority will come from downstate communities much wealthier than Dalton. Shipping solid waste long distances in New Hampshire from south to north is economically inefficient and environmentally detrimental. Moreover, the environmental impacts of GSL will be much more widespread than just the town of Dalton and will include at least four other North Country communities with demographics similar to Dalton.

For these reasons and lots of others, our coalition welcomes DES' consideration of the environmental justice implications of the GSL permit applications. We are happy to assist DES in this effort, and we encourage DES to hold a technical conference on these issues well before the issuance of any permits.

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