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North Country:House Committee Votes Against Recommending Landfill Buffer Bill

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Opponents to a landfill beside Forest Lake State Park in Dalton, some of whom are seen here in 2019, had their hopes dashed Wednesday when a New Hampshire House of Representatives committee voted to not recommend a bill that would prohibit the siting of new landfills within two miles of a state park. (File photo by Robert Blechl)



Those against the proposed landfill in Dalton beside Forest Lake State Park had their hopes dashed Wednesday when legislation that seeks to prohibit the siting of new landfills within two


miles of a state park was not recommended by a House committee.

In a close vote, 10-9, the New Hampshire House of Representatives Environment and Agriculture Committee found House Bill 177, which is sponsored by several local lawmakers, inexpedient to legislate.

The bill could go to a full House floor vote next week, though the committee's vote makes an affirmative full House vote a challenge.

"The North Country Alliance for Balanced Change is disappointed that the Environment and Agricultural Committee voted not to support HB 177," NCABC President Eliot Wessler said in a statement. "The sponsors of the bill did a great job making compelling arguments why this legislation is needed and we thank them for their effort. We hope that the opponents of the bill don't have to explain to their constituents some day why it's okay if state regulators, who are outmatched and outspent by out-of-state landfill developers, allow a huge landfill right next to their favorite state park."

The bill, whose sponsors include state Reps. Edith Tucker, D-Randolph, and Tim Egan, D-Sugar Hill, and state Rep. Erin Hennessey, R-Littleton, defines a state park as any park managed by the director of the New Hampshire Division of Parks and Recreation.

It does not include state historic sites or recreation rail trails and the bill would also not prohibit  the expansion of existing landfills.

Representatives for Casella Waste Systems, which is eyeing the Dalton site for a new privately-

owned commercial landfill to replace its current landfill in Bethlehem that is currently projected to close in five years, previously criticized the legislation and said its intent is to target its proposed landfill in Dalton.

After the committee's vote on Wednesday afternoon, state Rep. Troy Merner, R-Lancaster, who supports HB 177, said the majority of the letters he's received from across the state, other than Forest Lake residents, were mostly in opposition to the bill.

The discussion during the committee hearing entered into legalities and landowner rights, he said.

"We did get a lot of letters from Dalton people opposing the bill," said Merner. "Haulers also expressed concerns."

Those trash haulers currently haul waste from town transfer stations to the Casella landfill in Bethlehem.

Outside of the municipally-owned Androscoggin Valley Regional Refuse Disposal District's Mt. Carberry landfill near Berlin, Merner said haulers would have to go to Waste Management's Turnkey landfill in Rochester.

Merner's House district includes the towns of Carroll, Dalton, Jefferson, Lancaster, Northumberland, Randolph, Stark and Whitefield.



"Once it goes to the [House] floor I will support it because I represent those towns," he said.

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