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My Turn: Knocking on DES's door



View of the dump site across Forest Lake Courtesy of Sarah Doucette



By [SARAH DOUCETTE \(/byline?byline=By SARAH DOUCETTE.\)](#)

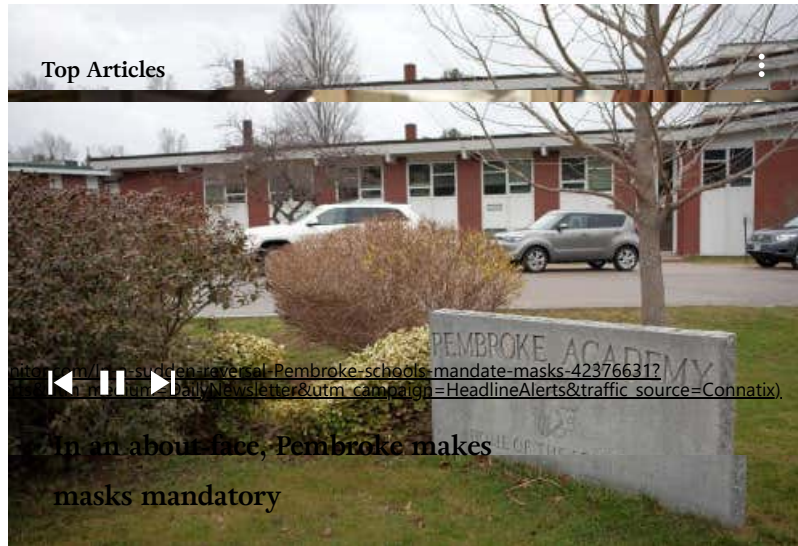
For the Monitor

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My year-round neighborhood is the photo you see here – admittedly, a privilege. Some of you already know about the proposed new landfill in Dalton. If built, it will rise up above those hills that you see across lovely, pristine Forest Lake. It will decimate more wetlands than the reviled Northern Pass project and topple upwards of 160 acres of forest. The

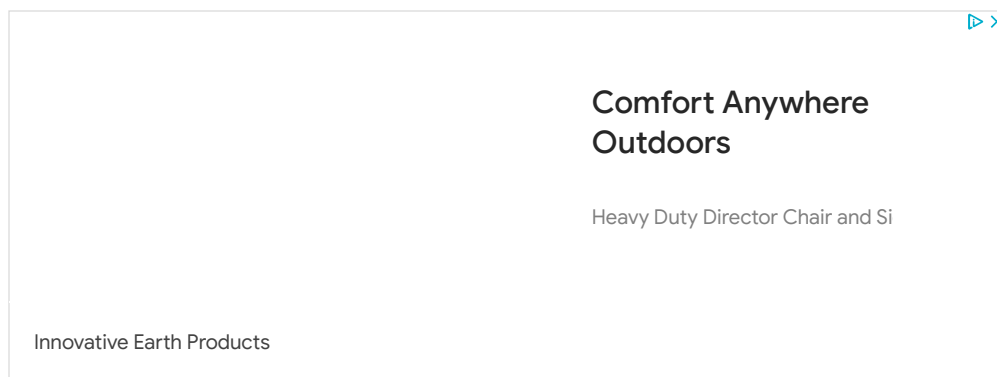
huge dump's first phases will cover an area the same size as the lake and about several hundred woodland acres that comprise a treasured state park.

For perspective, my family is in at least its seventh generation of calling this area home.



Let me share a problem my neighbors and I have with NH DES, the agency whose mission is “to help sustain a high quality of life for all citizens by protecting and restoring the environment and public health in New Hampshire. The protection and wise management of the state’s environment are the main goals of the agency.”

These days, I continually circle back to ponder why New Hampshire citizens cannot get a dialog with our DES regulators in the awful struggle around the Wetlands Permit for the Dalton dump project. Our future, and the state’s reputation and economy, literally depend on the agency’s staff in its privileged role to serve the people of New Hampshire.



DES has solicited public comments and those of our local conservation commissions over many months. We have submitted carefully considered and researched thoughts, many gleaned, at personal expense, with New Hampshire’s top legal, wetlands and hydrogeology specialists.

We, the people, continue to believe we are bringing DES solid evidence that one, there is no need for another commercial dump in New Hampshire for New Hampshire trash; and two, building an enormous facility in Dalton will imperil every fundamental aspect of our lives – clean air, clean water, public health and safe communities.

Not to mention the many downstate communities that will see numerous tankers carrying tens of thousands of gallons of toxic leachate almost daily for treatment in Concord, with the threat of spills and accidents all along the way. Also, an increasingly polluted Merrimack River with recreational, drinking water and wildlife impacts from PFAS contamination, a carcinogenic “forever chemical” that is not being removed from leachate effluent, and, ultimately, the doom of New Hampshire’s sterling reputation as a top vacation destination. Whoa!

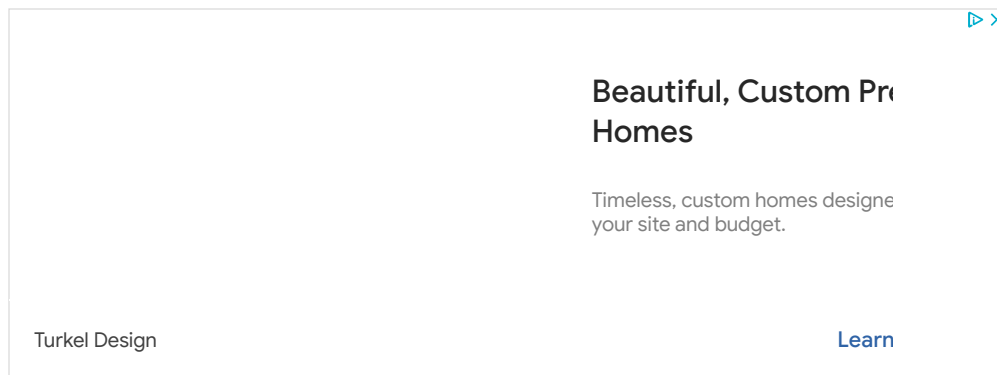
Despite our worthy testimony, DES is silent and has not engaged with us directly, even as legal counsel and community friends have respectfully requested meetings to discuss the project. Instead, the agency talks regularly and privately with a corporation that is determined to ruin our environment, livelihoods and peace of mind. We have trouble even getting timely notes from those meetings.

I ask, how about equal time in discussion with those whose lives hang in the balance in DES’s decisions?

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Until DES discusses our comments honestly with us, we are excluded from participating in our future. We have viable suggestions, problem-solving skills and a willingness to work with regulators and the state to solve our long-neglected solid waste management crisis.

By excluding us, the agency seems to advocate an ongoing partnership with Casella, an out-of-state company that has proven arrogant and disastrous in Bethlehem and promises a much larger disaster in Dalton. DES's decisions mustn't lock New Hampshire in for generations of crisis management with a company dazzled by their profit margin, all to the permanent detriment of life in the north country and beyond.



I have asked DES to sit down and talk to a group of us, privately, as concerned citizens, or in a public setting, and answer our earnest questions. We deserve that. Otherwise, we, our communities and the state's best interests are simply collateral damage, enduring disrespectful lip service from DES.

This message deserves a broad readership. Understand that no matter where you live or play in New Hampshire, Casella and the Dalton project may impact you. Your trash may now be piled up by Casella in Bethlehem and later, perhaps in Dalton, with its dangerous leachate effluent dumped into the Merrimack River in Franklin or Concord.

You may drink water from the Merrimack, the largest water source in the state. You may cherish the White Mountains, now chosen to become the new landfill capital of New England if the project is approved. And New Hampshire will have diminished landfill capacity for you and your community, given Casella's projection of bringing up to 49% of its waste to New Hampshire from out of state. Really. Their number.

How does that serve us? Where is the public benefit? We have plenty of capacity for New Hampshire trash in existing, permitted facilities if one takes the time to read the reports and footnotes from DES and the Mt. Carberry and Turnkey facilities. There is no need to desecrate a forested wetland wilderness, an unspoiled greenfield site.


There is no question solid waste management in New Hampshire is a mess, shockingly overdue for reform. Please join this discussion that will determine the environmental and public health, the reputation and the future of our exceptional state. Let's all ask DES to gather its courage, engage with transparency for the benefit of the people of New Hampshire and draw the line on a new, unneeded, unwanted landfill. This is a pivotal opportunity that demands uncommon leadership. It's time for our governor and legislators, along with DES, to step up.

(Sarah Doucette, a board member of North Country Alliance for Balanced Change, has been working in collaboration with Save Forest Lake, Forest Lake Association, NH Sierra Club, Conservation Law Foundation, and Community Action Works. She lives in Whitefield.)

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