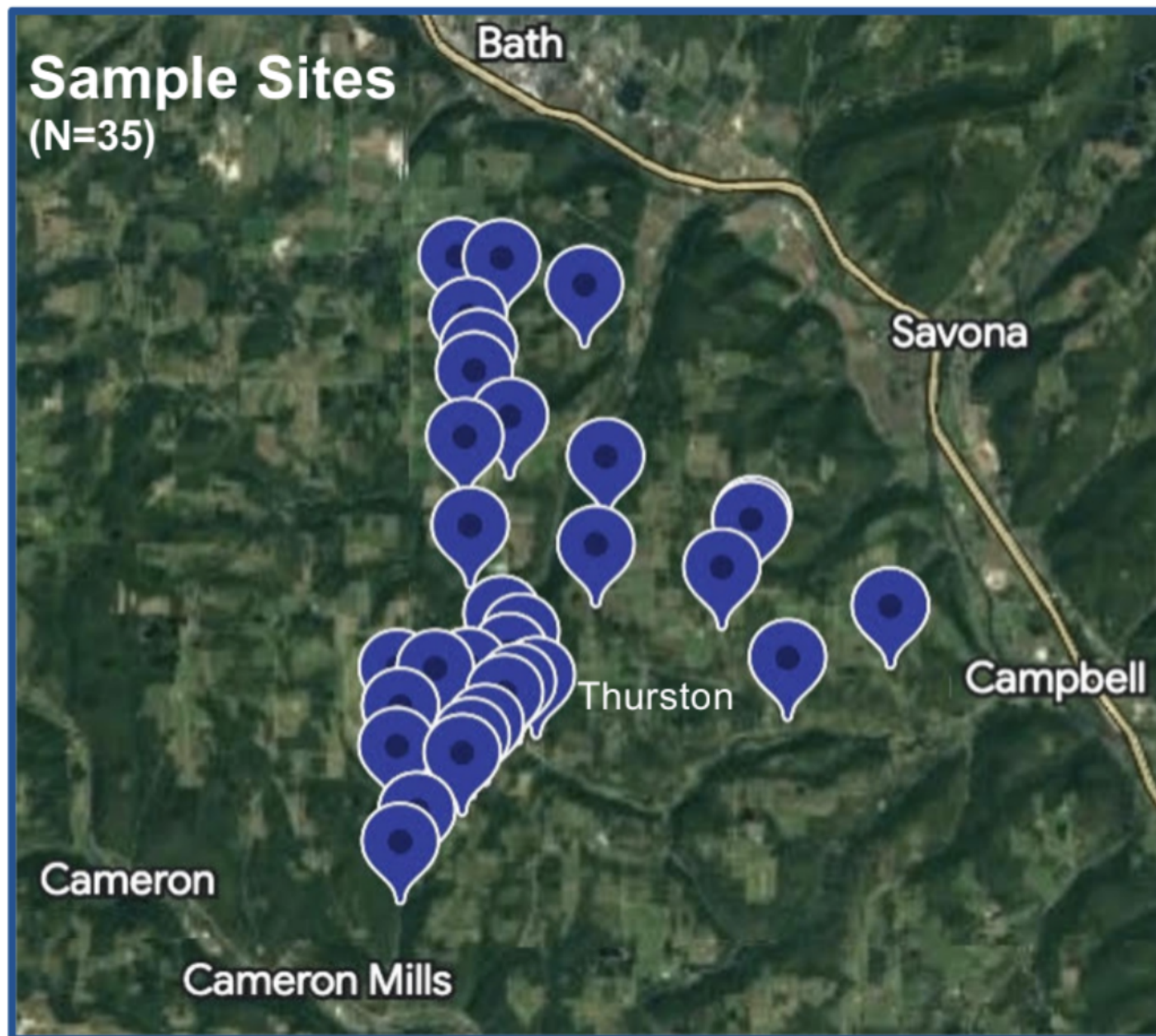


PFAS Found in All 35 Water Samples From Sites Near Sewage Sludge Fields in Steuben; Casella Calls Levels 'Minuscule'

[Peter Mantius](#) April 20, 2023 [Uncategorized](#)



Water sources near Steuben County (NY) fields spread with sewage sludge since the 1980s tended to have higher total PFAS than sources near fields where the spreading began in 2010.

THURSTON, Apr. 20, 2023 — Every water sample from 32 private wells near or adjacent to Steuben County fields that have been spread with municipal sewage sludge contained PFAS chemicals, recent independent testing found.

And water sources near fields that have had sludge spread since the 1980s had consistently higher levels of the 'forever chemicals' than sources adjacent to fields where sludge spreading began 30 years later.

The tests were funded by the Sierra Club and local residents who oppose Casella Organics' bid to take over the 40-year-old sludge spreading operation of Leo Dickson & Sons Inc. in the Bonny Hill area near the towns of Thurston, Cameron and Bath.

Mary Rayeski, Casella's Bonny Hill manager, dismissed the reported contamination levels as "minuscule" and noted that the test results were not certified.

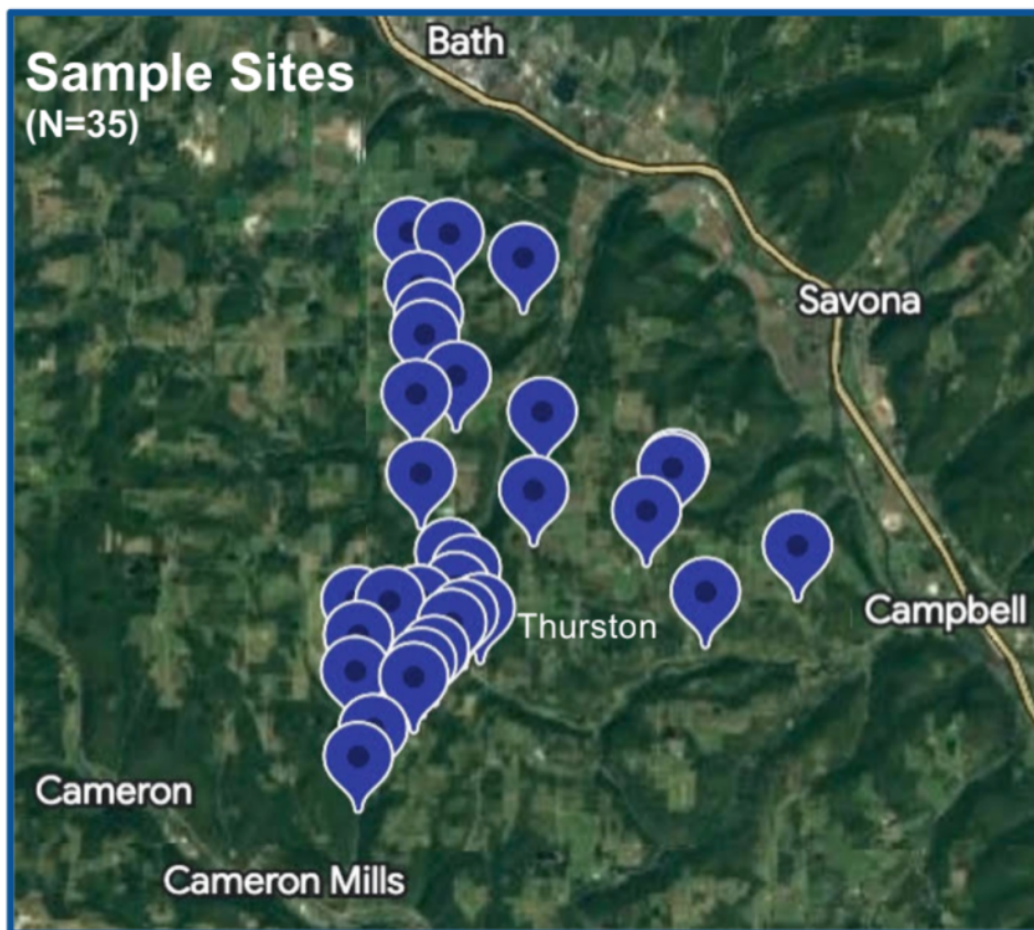
"Anybody who is concerned about their water wells, they need to come and see me," Rayeski said at a meeting of the Thurston Town Board last night. "We are putting together a protocol to hopefully help every single one of you. We will do certified testing."

After the meeting, Rayeski told WaterFront that Casella intends to offer free baseline water testing — for PFAS chemicals and heavy metals — as soon as next week.

She said the offer will extend to the owners of the wells that were just tested and to anyone else with a reasonable concern. She said Casella would absorb the costs of certified tests conducted by [ALS Environmental](#).

The uncertified tests were conducted last month by Illinois-based [Cyclopure](#) Labs on samples from 35 water sources, including 32 private wells and three public sources.

The results were presented to the Thurston board last night "for discussion purposes only," according to Elizabeth Donderewicz, who gave a [slide show](#) on behalf of the Sierra Club's Atlantic Chapter.



Water sources near Steuben County (NY) fields spread with sewage sludge since the 1980s tended to have higher total PFAS than sources near fields where the spreading began in 2010.

Test Results

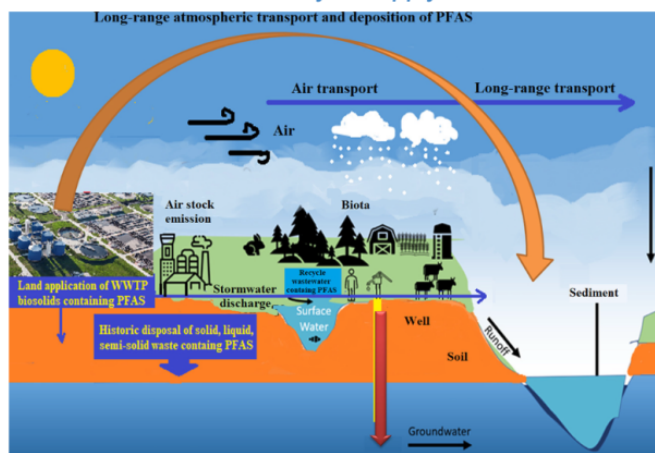
- **Water from all 35 Thurston-area sources (including 32 private wells) near or adjacent to sludge-spread fields contained PFAS compounds.**
- **31% of those water sources had combined PFAS above 1 part per trillion.**
- **8 of 10 (80%) of water sources near fields where sludge has been spread since the 1980s had PFAS above 1 ppt, compared to 3 of 25 wells (12%) of sources near fields where spreading began in 2010.**
- **The five sources with the highest total PFAS results were all near fields spread since the 1980s, in the Bonny Hill area.**
- **Three of those five water sources had PFOS or PFOA compounds above the EPA's proposed limit for required remediation of 4 ppt.**
- **NYS requires public water systems to limit PFOA and PFOS to 10 ppt. EPA has proposed enforceable limits of 4 ppt for those compounds. EPA's health advisory limits are 0.004 ppt for PFOA and 0.02 ppt for PFOS.**
- **Water samples were tested in March by Illinois-based Cyclopure Labs. The tests, funded by the Sierra Club and local donations, were not certified.**

The testing was prompted by widespread reports that sewage sludge tends to be laced with PFAS chemicals. Although New York doesn't require testing of sewage sludge before it is spread on fields, the state of [Maine](#) [banned the practice](#) last year after several farms were ruined when PFAS contaminated soil, crops, animals and milk.

PFAS is shorthand for a class of more than 10,000 man-made chemicals used to make stain-resistant clothing, cosmetics and many other common products. The compounds, which can be carcinogenic in extremely tiny doses, do not break down readily and bioaccumulate in humans, animals and plants.

Why It Matters in Thurston

"Time heals all wounds" may not apply to PFAS contamination.



"WWTTP" = Waste Water Treatment Plant
 Visual Source: Science Direct, February 2022.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969721060812>

- Land application of biosolids containing PFAS **collects in the ground and water**
- PFOS and PFOA are both **highly persistent in the environment and highly mobile**. Both chemicals have a tendency to **bioaccumulate in humans, terrestrial organisms, and aquatic organisms**.
- PFOS and PFOA have been **measured in biosolids in multiple published studies**.¹

Source: ¹EPA Biosolids Meeting, November 2020 (see appendix for details).

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In the recent tests, combined PFAS chemicals totaled more than 1 part per trillion in sampled water from 31 percent of the sources.

Eight of the 10 water sources near fields where sludge has been spread since the 1980s had PFAS above 1 ppt, compared to 3 of 25 sources near fields where spreading began in 2010.

The five sources with the highest total PFAS results were all near fields spread since the 1980s.

Three of those five water sources had PFOS or PFOA compounds above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposed enforceable limit of 4 ppt. Public water systems above that level would be required to reduce it.

New York State requires public water systems to limit PFOA and PFOS to 10 ppt. If and when the EPA's proposed 4 ppt limit is approved, New York will need to adopt the lower standard.

Last year, the [EPA set health advisory limits](#) of 0.004 ppt for PFOA and 0.02 ppt for PFOS — levels so minuscule that no lab test can measure them.

"The problem is PFAS chemicals bioaccumulate," Bill Mattingly, of the Sierra Club's Atlantic Chapter, told the Thurston board. "If there's PFAS in the fertilizer and the plants take it up and the animals eat (the plants), they will bioaccumulate the chemicals."

While the audience of about 60 was quietly attentive during the Donderewicz slide show, tensions mounted later in the meeting as local residents and board members challenged Casella officials for failing to fully explain their intentions.

"We're getting pretty defensive of our properties," said Tim Hargrave, who owns a 100-acre farm adjacent to a Dickson field. "The more you guys hide, the harder we're pushing back. Do you have any plans to reach out to adjacent landowners and give them extensive baseline tests of their water wells?"

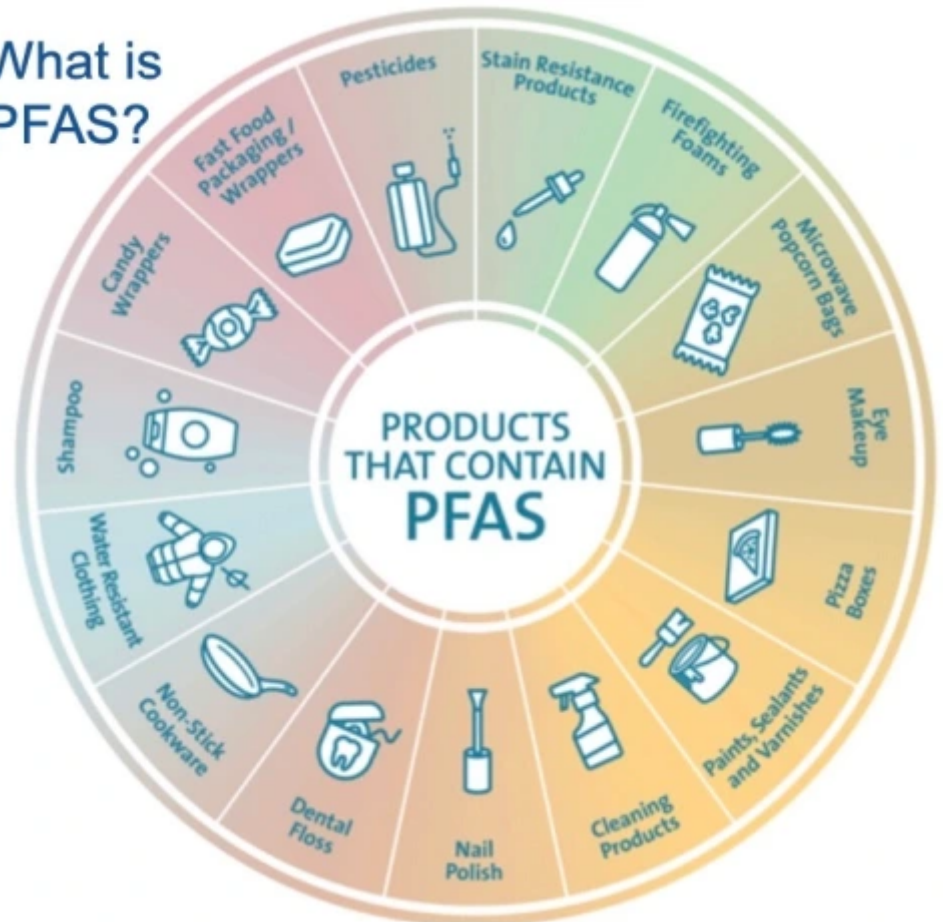
His question prompted Rayeski to promise certified testing for "every single one of you."

When Casella Organics acquired or leased [2,789 acres](#) from Leo Dickson & Sons last July it did not notify local officials, and the deal passed under the public radar throughout the Fall.

But three months before the transactions, Dickson applied to the state Department of Environmental Conservation for permission to accept sludge from the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant on Long Island.

Casella already had an extensive relationship with the huge facility just east of JFK International Airport. The company accepted tens of thousands of tons of Bay Park sewage sludge last year at landfills it operates in Steuben, Chemung and Ontario counties.

What is PFAS?





Casella's Larry Shilling (left) and Mary Rayeski (right) at Thurston board meeting Wednesday.

Casella has applied to the DEC to have Dickson's sludge spreading permit transferred to its name. Under that permit, Dickson is allowed to take sludge from more than two dozen sewage treatment plants in the Finger Lakes, the Southern Tier and northern Pennsylvania.

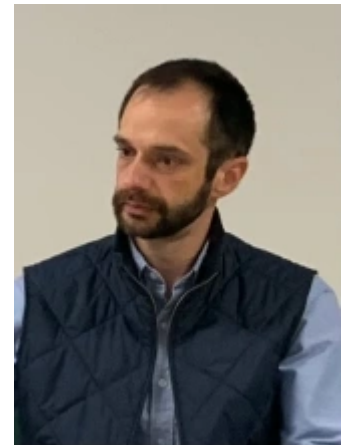
Because [Bay Park](#)'s capacity is much larger than any of those plants, residents of Thurston have been uneasy about the prospect of a significant expansion of sludge spreading, which has long been suspected of spoiling local water wells.

"PFAS is not the only problem," Wayne Wells, a long-time opponent of the Dickson operation, told the Thurston board. "These sludges are loaded with ... heavy metals."

In February, the Thurston town board enacted a [one-year moratorium](#) on new or expanded waste projects — including sludge spreading. Earlier this month, the neighboring town of Cameron passed its own moratorium with identical wording.

According to Michael Volino, Thurston's town supervisor, DEC officials are poised to allow Dickson to add Bay Park as a sludge source in spite of the moratoriums.

Volino said he learned in a phone conversation with three DEC officials last week that they were about to declare the addition of Bay Park a "minor modification" to the Dickson permit. Such a label would allow the agency to skip a public hearing.



Michael Volino

At the meeting last night, Volino prodded Casella officials:

"Casella, you seem to have a special relationship with the DEC, Region 8. Talk to them. Get them to come here and talk to us."

When Casella's Larry Shilling responded, "We don't control DEC," scattered laughter broke out.