

NEWS POLITICS

At Forest Lake, Ayotte Makes Good on Landfill Pledge



by **Leonard Robinson**

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Governor Kelly Ayotte at Forest Lake State Park for a ceremonial signing of House Bill 707 on July 30, 2026. (CREDIT: Leonard Robinson)



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Ayotte made the comments at the signing of House Bill 707 last week, creating a new committee tasked with evaluating potential sites for future landfills in the state. It establishes a seven-member solid waste site evaluation committee tasked with weighing new landfill proposals against human health, environmental and economic concerns raised by local communities.



Forest Lake State Park has been ground zero for the yearslong legislative fight, which traces back to opposition that emerged around 2018 and intensified after Casella Waste Systems' subsidiary, Granite State Landfill, filed a permit application for a nearby site in October 2023 — before the company ultimately withdrew a key permit in June. But the Vermont-based company has not walked away for good.

The project was denied a permit by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, which deemed the application “dormant.” Granite State Landfill, a Casella subsidiary, sued the state in April 2025, arguing that dormancy was not a lawful ground for denial and that the agency had exceeded its authority.

This summer, Casella's strategy collapsed on multiple fronts: a judge rejected the company's lawsuit, and Casella withdrew a wetland permit application central to the project in a letter dated June 15. Now Ayotte has signed the bill that effectively bars any new permit until at least July 1, 2027, or until the committee adopts new rules, whichever is later.

Local lawmakers were on hand for the signing, including Sens. David Rochefort, R-Littleton, and Howard Pearl, R-Loudon, and retiring state Rep. Judy Aron, R-Acworth, who chairs the House Committee on Environment and Agriculture. Dalton residents and activists from Save Forest Lake and the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change (NCABC) were also in attendance.

NCABC activists have sparred with legislators in Concord over past iterations of the legislation and introduced a host of new activists and organizations to the state along the way.



Ayotte, who is seeking a second term this November, used the opportunity to remind voters that signing the legislation was another “promise made, promise kept” moment for her administration.

Attendees told NH Journal that they were elated at the end of the battle, even as some expressed concern about future landfill developments.

Adam Finkel, a Dalton resident and outspoken NCABC activist, told NH Journal he expects Casella to continue searching for landfill sites across the state. And according to Casella’s own statements, that’s entirely possible.

In withdrawing its wetland permit, Casella stated that it “reserves all rights” and vowed to continue pursuing the site, framing the withdrawal as a procedural move to align its remaining reviews with the solid-waste permit still under appeal. The company holds a long-term interest in the surrounding land, and nothing in the recent setbacks legally forecloses a future application once the new siting moratorium lifts. For now, the combination of the denied permit, the lost lawsuit, the withdrawn wetland application and the new law leaves the Dalton landfill stalled and improbable — but, in the words that have defined this seven-year fight, not completely dead.

Meanwhile, opponents of the landfill have a new target for their political activism: data centers.

“It’s over for landfills for now,” an NCABC activist told NHJournal on background. “Next up is data centers.”

Ayotte’s Democratic opponent, former Executive Councilor Cinde Warmington, is already making the data center issue part of her campaign against the incumbent governor. Warmington has called for a statewide moratorium on data center development, and she’s accusing Ayotte of not doing enough to stop it.

“She [Ayotte] has failed to take any action, and she’s had an opportunity to take action,” Warmington told WMUR. “She had bills in the legislature. She could have really been championing a moratorium to make sure that we’re putting these protections in place.”