

Casella submits new permit applications in a renewed push for a landfill in Dalton

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Casella's proposed landfill would be built in Dalton, NH

A controversial proposed landfill in Dalton has new applications for permits in front of state regulators.

Granite State Landfill LLC, a subsidiary of Casella Waste Systems, submitted an application for a solid waste facility permit for the Dalton site in October. The company has also submitted an air permit application.

The Dalton landfill project has divided residents of the North Country town and sparked policy discussions about how New Hampshire handles trash.

Casella Waste Systems has been proposing a landfill in Dalton, near Forest Lake State Park, for about five years. The project has changed over time, and the current proposal is for a landfill about half the size of the original. The company withdrew previous permit applications in 2022.

The landfill now being proposed in the company's 2023 applications is 70 acres and would receive 1,800 tons of waste every day for 18 years.

The current chair of Dalton's conservation commission, Jon Swan, has long opposed the project. He says there are concerns about increased traffic and environmental hazards, and that Dalton could become home for trash from Massachusetts and Connecticut.

"People within the state of New Hampshire have come to realize that we don't want to be the dumping ground for New England waste. And that's what's being proposed, in essence," he said.

Swan also said the landfill application seems to "fly in the face" of the state's goals to reduce waste 25% by 2030 and 45% by 2050, laid out in state law.

"I don't see the benefit," Swan said. "For only 18 years, is it worth sacrificing Forest Lake State Park?"

The property the landfill is located on is next to Forest Lake State Park, and at its closest point, the landfill would be located 2,400 feet from Forest Lake, according to the application. Casella says the landfill would not be visible from the public beach inside of the state park, which would be three quarters of a mile from the landfill.

The new proposal is 20 feet shorter than the original plan and reduces the project's impact on wetlands by 40%, said Jeff Weld, a spokesperson for Casella.

"The project took into account all that we had heard from regulators, from the community, from other stakeholders, and put forward a project that we feel is

both necessary and a much better project overall," he said.

Casella's permit application includes a "public benefit demonstration," outlining how building the landfill could help further the state's solid waste goals. It includes a proposal by Casella to construct a recycling facility in Southern New Hampshire, if the Dalton landfill is built, and a line that says Casella will commit to reserving more than half of the space in the landfill for trash generated in New Hampshire.

State regulators say it will take at least a year to consider the company's solid waste permit application, and Casella has not yet submitted other applications for necessary environmental permits.

Mike Wimsatt, the head of the waste management division at the Department of Environmental Services, says the agency will host opportunities for public comment during the permitting process.

Wimsatt also said regulators are still determining how they will consider environmental justice— the idea that historically marginalized communities have borne the brunt of environmental contaminants – in their decision making.

"There's a lot of interest in that issue and a lot of discussion about it, but very little in the way of law in New Hampshire right now," he said.

The Department of Environmental Services says in the absence of state environmental justice laws, they're following federal guidance. But, Wimsatt said, the absence of state laws in New Hampshire could limit

what regulators are able to do within the permitting process.

“At the end of the day when we have to make a permit decision, we'll consult with our attorneys to determine what factors we can and can't lawfully consider,” he said.