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Protest precedes hearing on wetlands permit for Dalton landfill

By John Koziol Union Leader Correspondent

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Holding her owl “Hootie,” Marcia Hammon and Bonnie White, right, were among those who turned out Wednesday to protest the NH Department of Environmental Services’ granting a wetlands permit for the proposed Granite State Landfill in Dalton.

John Koziol/Union Leader Correspondent

WHITEFIELD — To make the point that a landfill next to Forest Lake State Park is a bad idea, Marcia Hammon brought her toy owl “Hootie” to Wednesday’s New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Wetlands Bureau hearing on a wetland permit for the proposed facility.

Hammon, of Whitefield, came to the hearing in the auditorium at White Mountains Regional High School because she worries that the effects of the Granite State Landfill, which would be in neighboring Dalton, would spill downhill and to the east into her community.

“I’m very concerned that Whitefield has the biggest negative potential from this,” she said, adding that apart from increased noise, pollution and traffic from the landfill, which would be a subsidiary of Casella Waste Management, she expects odors from the landfill to waft into Whitefield.

She also worries about how the landfill might impact local and regional water quality.

“I know the value of the water draining down” the watershed from the landfill into the Johns River and then into the Connecticut River, said Hammon, adding that water quality and habitat would suffer along the way.

Bonnie White of Dalton said she came to the hearing to encourage DES to deny the application to impact some 17 acres of wetlands to build of the landfill.

DES will continue accepting public comment on the application into August; White said she hoped the agency got the message at Wednesday’s hearing that the landfill is not a good solution to the state’s solid-waste disposal needs.

Also, “when you destroy water,” she said, “you destroy life.”

Both she and Hammon think there’s enough capacity at existing landfills to accommodate waste generated in New Hampshire, including at Mount Carberry in Success.

The DES hearing was “hugely important,” said White, because if the wetlands application is not granted, the entire landfill project could falter.

Leslie Dreier of Bethlehem — where Casella operates the North Country Environmental Services landfill — said the proposed Dalton landfill, which Casella said it needs to build because the Bethlehem landfill is running out of room, “is a terrible idea” because of its proximity to Forest Lake State Park.

Earlier this year, lawmakers killed House Bill 177, which would have prevented the construction of a landfill within two miles of a state park.

“A lot of people in Concord don’t understand how many people use Forest Lake,” said Dreier.

White said she has three grandsons who she hopes will be able to enjoy Forest Lake for many years.

White and Hammon were among scores of people who responded to Jon Swan’s online appeals to protest the landfill.

Swan is a founder of Save Forest Lake and was instrumental in Dalton voters adopting emergency zoning regulations with the intent of stopping the landfill through the municipal review process.

Voters at Dalton Town Meeting in June re-authorized the zoning regulations.

Casella officials have said that the state has the ultimate say on whether a landfill can be built in Dalton.

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