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Protesters Rally Against Proposed Casella Landfill At Wetlands Permit Hearing In North Country

By JANE VAUGHAN (/PEOPLE/JANE-VAUGHAN), & ANNIE ROPEIK (/PEOPLE/ANNIE-ROPEIK) • 11 HOURS AGO

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Protesters gather outside a public hearing for a new landfill in the North Country. 70 people were signed up to speak at the hearing.

JANE VAUGHAN / NHPR

Opponents of a proposed new landfill in the North Country rallied Wednesday outside a state public hearing for one of the project's first required permits.

Vermont-based trash company Casella wants to build the 137-acre landfill in the town of Dalton, adjacent to Forest Lake State Park. Casella says the Dalton project is needed to expand the state and region's landfill capacity. The new dump would get just under half of its trash from out of state and would have space to operate until around 2060.

Opponents worry the landfill will hurt local tourism and the environment, and they say it's the wrong approach to the future of the state's solid waste.

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This first permit would allow the landfill to impact about 17 acres of wetlands – the first big hurdle in a potentially lengthy state regulatory process. Seventy people were signed up to speak at the hearing.

The rally before the hearing drew dozens of protesters of all ages. They were in high spirits and carried signs outside White Mountains Regional High School in Whitefield.

Berkley Parenteau, from Norfolk, Mass., said she's grown up visiting a family home on Forest Lake. It's one of the state's original 10 state parks, and she would like to see it protected.

"We call it our little piece of paradise. I'm still a child, but a lot of memories I have are at the lake," she said at the rally. "When I'm older, I want my kids to be able to swim in the lake and have as much fun as we do."

Bonnie White of Dalton said the state and its neighbors should change their approach to solid waste instead of creating a new landfill.

"Maybe some of the other states really need to step up and figure out this too and come up with those alternative solutions," White said.

Landfill opponents say New Hampshire should do more to follow its own solid waste hierarchy (<https://www.des.nh.gov/waste/solid-waste/waste-reduction-and-diversion>), which prioritizes reducing trash creation, reuse, recycling and composting over landfilling.

Pam Ladds traveled to the rally from Newport, Vermont to warn New Hampshire against approving the landfill, which she said is an outdated technology.

"We have a landfill there, a Casella-owned landfill," she said. "It is right on the shores of our lake, it is right into the wetlands, and I would like to New Hampshire not to be as stupid as Vermont has been."

Ladds said noise pollution from trucks has been a problem at her local landfill, as has environmental degradation from leachate. Also known also as "garbage juice," it results from rain and liquid settling through solid waste and is pumped out of landfills.

Casella's Bethlehem landfill, near the proposed Dalton site, saw a large spill of leachate in May. The company is also being sued by the nonprofit Conservation Law Foundation for allegedly contaminating the Ammonoosuc River with leachate from that facility.

At the hearing, Casella engineer John Gay argued that Forest Lake isn't at risk from water pollution linked to the proposed Dalton landfill because a ridgeline separates the two. He said the facility will be double-lined and equipped with state-mandated groundwater monitors.

"This landfill will not have an impact on the water quality from the groundwater or surface water perspective. Can't happen," Gay said, drawing boos and yelling from the audience.

Casella still faces myriad regulatory steps after the state decides on the Dalton project's wetlands permit including obtaining a permit for air emissions, another for land disturbance and a solid waste permit to actually run the proposed landfill.

7:03 p.m: *This article has been updated.*

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