

THIS ISSUE

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A.C.T. AGAINST COAL ASH WANTS ANSWERS

With a continued lack of clear response from the Town or DEQ, the ACT group was driven to host a press conference to demand answers and accountability about the 828 MLK Coal Ash Remediation Project which could set precedent for how coal ash sites are redeveloped throughout the state.

On November 16th, in advance of the Town Council Meeting, local Chapel Hill residents, coal ash impacted community members and activists will highlight the questions raised during the special meeting with DEQ that went unanswered and speak about the lack of transparency in information and decision making processes.

For more information or to get involved, contact Christine Diaz at christine@cwfn.org.

NO HIDING A HEAP OF COAL ASH CONCERNS

The property of 828 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd in the Town of Chapel Hill (Town) is host to a police station as well as 60,000 cubic yards of coal ash, which can contain toxic heavy metals and radioactive materials hazardous to health. The Town acquired the 10-acre property and constructed the current police building in the early 1980s, before the coal ash was discovered at the site in 2013. Since then, the Town has developed proposed plans for remediation, a cap and contain method, which includes removing the exposed coal ash on the surface and to cover it with 3-4ft of soil and build a retention wall to prevent runoff into Bolin Creek.

The ACT Against Coal Ash group along with neighbors, local and statewide coalitions of coal ash impacted community members, and other members of the public voiced questions and concerns at a May 16th meeting with the Town's consultants and NCDEQ's Brownfields Program. Some questions were answered during the meeting, while additional responses would require further consultation, but all were promised to be addressed and posted on the Town's website. DEQ waited 70 days to post responses, and even then, less than half the questions were answered and many were essentially evaded, overgeneralized, or pushed to future decisions in later stages of the project.

The Town recently posted a status update, which considers a phased approach to the redevelopment, but the update still leaves many questions unanswered, including potential health impacts to the cleanup crew, local townspeople who use the property, and the landfill community who receives the coal ash.

WHO WE ARE

Clean Water for NC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a mission to promote clean, safe water and environments and empowered, just communities for all North Carolinians through organizing, education, advocacy, and technical assistance.

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ABOUT US



WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER, CANDELA

Join us in welcoming our newest member of the CWFNC Board of Directors, Candela Cerpa, who joined us in August! She is a current master's student in City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Originally from Uruguay, Candela moved from Maryland to Durham in 2020, and has since been working with communities across the South on voting rights, redistricting, environmental justice, and justice system reform with the Southern Coalition for Social Justice.



Candela is passionate about supporting communities in working towards clean, safe environments, particularly when it comes to water resources. She is very excited to join the CWFNC Board of Directors and getting to know and support more residents who are active in their communities.

A FOND FAREWELL TO RACHEL

In October, we gave a fond farewell to Rachel Velez, our Water Justice Program Director and Communications Manager. She joined CWFNC in 2017, beginning first as a volunteer, then as EJ Organizer and Communications Coordinator. Over her years with us, she wore many hats in working with the FrackFreeNC group to defeat the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, pushing for changes in the federal EPA's Lead and Copper Rule, and most recently in leading issues related to drinking water utilities and groundwater wells.



As Rachel further grows her skillset, she is moving into the public health field on the national level where we know she will carry the principles of EJ with her and continue making a difference in the world! Please feel free to read her personal farewell message at cwfn.org/rachel-farewell/

WATER JUSTICE: INFRASTRUCTURE

ACCESS TO WATER INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDS



Almost \$2B of NC's federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were set aside specifically for drinking water, sewer, and stormwater investments. This unprecedented injection of infrastructure funding for NC's 1,800 public community water systems is a crucial step forward to promoting public health, ensuring system viability, and providing the necessary resources for system managers to deploy best practices for maintenance, operation, and reinvestment. The NC Department of Environmental Quality's (NC DEQ) Division of Water Infrastructure (DWI) manages the application process and criteria for these ARPA funds.

CWFNC recognizes that many of our state's smaller, more rural systems may not have the capacity to navigate the application process and produce robust, competitive proposals that would secure funding. These include the 94 "distressed" public community water systems in NC, many of which are employed by only 1-3 full time staff and serve less than 3,000 customers.

Accordingly, CWFNC developed our ARPA outreach program to directly notify all 94 distressed water systems about the available funding and provide application assistance. There was much confusion about the state fiscal recovery fund (which houses the ARPA funds for water and sewer investments) and the local fiscal recovery fund (which municipalities automatically received as part of the overall ARPA package). We also learned that many systems were unaware of who to speak with at the DWI and how to request additional assistance and trainings for creating their proposals. Most surprisingly, almost 1/3 of the town officials we spoke with had no idea about the ARPA water and sewer funding at all!

We were able to compile an all-in-one resource packet tailor-made to each water system that requested our assistance. These packets included a general overview of the ARPA funds, how they could be used to address infrastructure needs, the application training schedule and recordings, application forms, and how to request one-on-one assistance from DWI officials. In total, 16 systems from the Fall Round and 29 systems from the Spring Round were successful in acquiring ARPA funds to address water and wastewater rehabilitations, water system line extensions, and a variety of study grants!

AQUA NC STATEWIDE RATE HIKE

Aqua NC is one of the largest corporate water utilities in NC. This year, proposed rate hikes will affect all customers of Aqua NC. Not only is Aqua NC seeking approval to raise rates for all customers across North Carolina, but they are also requesting the NC Utilities Commission (NCUC) approve their multi-year rate plan that would set rates 3 years in advance without the opportunity for annual public input.

Some concerns about multi-year rate plans include inaccurate or biased projections, encouraging utilities to increase costs even if there are cost overruns or delays, and having customers prematurely paying for projects in advance of receiving services. Public Hearings were held throughout the state through October 2022 by the NCUC as an opportunity for customers to speak directly to NCUC Commissioners and provide testimony.

For more information about the Aqua NC Rate Hike, please visit: tinyurl.com/aqua-rate-hike

NO SACRIFICE ZONES: APPALACHIAN RESISTANCE IN DC

On September 8th Clean Water for NC staff joined with over 600 organizers, Indigenous water protectors, climate activists and impacted community members gathered in Washington D.C. to show opposition to Sen. Joe Manchin's "dirty side deal." Before the rally, members of the group spent the day lobbying members of Congress and shared stories and urged their Representatives to oppose the side deal.

The underhanded pipeline bill proposed by Sen. Manchin and supported by Sen. Chuck Schumer has been written by and for the fossil fuel industry, and further causes concerns for frontline communities. The bill would introduce a wide range of changes to the review process of energy projects, fast track the Mountain Valley Pipeline which continues to face various violations, and weaken government safeguards like National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act, in place to prevent harms to frontline communities from many types of projects.

While the bill was removed from 'must-pass' legislation to keep the government funded in September, we anticipate that despite continued resistance from the public, the bill will be included again in another 'must-pass' bill in December.

To read more about the rally and join in, in ongoing efforts, visit: tinyurl.com/dc-recap



FINDING CAMARADERIE AT THE EJ SUMMIT

In 1998, the 1st annual NC Community Environmental Justice (EJ) Summit was held at the historical Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, NC. The summit was created from groundwork done the year prior, and helped form the NC Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN) that we know today.

This past October, Clean Water for NC staff were able to attend the most recent EJ Summit and connect with fellow advocates, academics, and engaged community members. Belinda Joyner, Clean Water's Northeastern Organizer and longtime attendee, reflected on her past experiences at the summit. She described the focus on community impacts with engagement and interaction from organizers such as herself. Camaraderie was especially important, with memories of karaoke and piano playing in the evening as participants enjoyed each other's company. The next day would be filled with breakout sessions, with attendees splitting up into individual groups and later coming back together to reflect on their takeaways. Youth attendees had their own sessions and would report back afterwards. Babies and children brought to the summit, often year after year, were fondly dubbed "EJ Babies."

Due to the pandemic, the EJ Summit has not met in-person the last two years. Clean Water staff were excited to participate in this year's summit, as it was the first time for several of us to attend. This year's summit was purposely different, reflecting the shifted dynamics of NCEJN and the world we live in today. The summit's program stated, "[with] this being our first in-person Summit in two years, we decided to focus on connection and community, foregoing some of those aspects but maintaining the goal of building power and paving the way forward."





With these goals in mind, the first day of the summit emphasized connecting with ourselves and others, through breath work, body movement, and storytelling. Memories of those EJ advocates who had recently passed away brought tears to the eyes of many in the audience. Moments of levity, however, interspersed the serious with jokes and fond remembrance. A disgruntled groundhog even made an appearance, running through the crowd shrieking on its way back to its burrow. As we gathered by the campfire after dinner, stories passed around about past EJ victories, the struggles for workers' rights, and the passion that drives forward those seeking change.

The next day brought new light and renewed energy. Pallav Das, Co-founder of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group spoke of revolutionary influencers and progressive systems to push against injustice, reminding us of how we can learn from different places and time periods.



A breakout session allowed us to hear directly from a few impacted community members who spoke about barriers to public participation and the needs that have gone unmet within their communities. EJ advocates likewise expressed their desire to reach more people with the services they provide. We were reminded that we could all expand our reach and serve more of those needs by working together in cooperation to identify gaps and link to other groups who serve a specific function—perhaps it might be translation services, legal aid, or, in our case, drinking water advocacy.

The notion of providing connection where needed was present in each of the circles we shared at the summit. As the summit wound to an end, we all joined hands and spoke, one after the other,

I am a link in the chain, and the link in the chain will not break here.

These words solidify our connection to each other and the mission at hand, building a more equitable and just world, with a safe and livable environment, for all.

Q&A WITH CAROLINA POULTRY POWER

On September 1st, Clean Water for NC hosted a meeting between Carolina Poultry Power (CPP) and fellow advocacy organizations to better understand the proposed operation in La Grange, NC. CPP is a poultry waste-to-energy company that converts dry chicken litter into electricity through the process of gasification.

The company has one facility already running, one under construction, and the proposed La Grange site. The meeting was held during the extended public comment period of the air permitting process. Participants were able to ask questions about the operation's air quality controls, community impacts, comparable facilities, and more. Clean Water for NC was glad to have the opportunity to facilitate conversation between CPP and those interested in the environmental and health impacts of such an operation.

We appreciated the management of CPP being willing to answer questions and go in-depth with their waste-to-energy procedure. We equally appreciated the thoughtful feedback and engaged discussion from community organizers, Riverkeepers, and environmental justice advocates. While the La Grange operation has been granted its air permits by the Division of Air Quality, we hope to continue the conversation and push for more sustainable, healthy waste management practices.

HIGH ROCK LAKE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

The High Rock Lake (HRL) Watershed extends through several Western Piedmont NC counties. The lake itself is inundated with nutrient pollution, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, which has resulted in recurring algal blooms.

In September, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) hosted two in-person stakeholder meetings to discuss the nutrient management plans for this lake and watershed. Clean Water for NC staff were able to attend one of those meetings to learn more about the sources of nutrient overloads and how this could affect rates for water customers downstream.

It is important in any stakeholder process to have representatives of all who are impacted at the table, which includes ratepayers and neighbors of polluting industries.

One way to get involved is to sign up for DEQ's High Rock Lake listserv to stay up to date with the latest news related to the nutrient management strategy. DEQ also has a webpage with resources and information on this plan, including materials from the September meetings.

To sign up for the listserv or download these materials, go to tinyurl.com/high-rock-lake

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT



40 YEARS OF EJ: THANK YOU TO PANELISTS

Please join us in thanking Rev. William Kearney, Angella Dunston, and Danielle Koonce for their wonderful perspectives and input in commemorating 40 Years of Environmental Justice!

They participated in a panel hosted by Clean Water for North Carolina on Friday, September 30, 2022, speaking on the birth of the EJ movement in Warren County to Today & Beyond!

Key Takeaways:

- As Rev. Kearney put it, we are pushing through some necessary discomforts in "Reconciling & Celebrating."
- Danielle touched on the Power of Erasure and importance of Community Empowerment.
- Angella reminded us that communities CAN come together and be successful.

The central point: **community voices need to be at the CENTER of the conversation & decision-making.**

Questions & Answers:

The conversational panel picked up questions as they arose in the chat during their panel as well as during the Q&A session at the end. They covered questions about:

- What impacted communities and allies can do;
- How their organizations adapted over time as technology and demographics change, especially in light of Covid-19; and
- How people live in their power, connect with local government and state office staff who will be implementing federal policy, and strengthen their capacity to participate in decision-making.

Wraparound & Video Recording:

During the webinar and on our event resources page, we provided information about how you can help today, including supporting our speaker organizations: Warren County Environmental Action Team (WCEAT), Environmental Justice Community Action Network (EJCAN), and NC League of Conservation Voters (NCLCV).

For more information like the answers to the Q&A, how to support these organizations, and to watch the video recording, please visit: tinyurl.com/ej-resources

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT 7

THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 NEW & RECURRING MEMBERS

Cheryl Angel	Ethical Humanist Society	Laurie & Alan Lamoreaux	Jane & Dave Richardson
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Nancy & Dick Bennett	Jeri Gray	Judy Ann Martinez	Scott Schang
Betsy Bickel	Arnold & Bernice Green	Karen Maune	Ken & Betsy Schapira
Katherine Blackburn	Carol & David Greenspan	Ron & Terry McCollum	Lao Rubert & Steve Schewel
Katherine Breckheimer	Violet Hays	Michael McCue	Judy Futch & Paul Smith
T. Butler	John & Emy Hinnant	Barbara McCutchen	Pat Tompkins
Anne Cassebaum	Mitchell H. Jackson	John H. Noel	John Wagner
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SNEAK PEEK OF OUR NEW LOGO COMING IN JANUARY!

We are excited to share a sneak peek of our new look with you, coming in January 2023!

Our **community empowerment** and **teamwork** values are represented with the **unity** and **cooperation** of two hands joined together as a team.

The overall shape is a **water** droplet that also showcases open **air** behind the unified hands, which are supported below by the mountain-shaped **land**. This image represents the water, air, and land we seek to protect, as a **holistic environmental health** approach. The hands coming together also represent the **joining of people**, **unifying in solidarity** and celebrating our diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. We **uplift** one another and push for **equity** when protecting our natural resources.



In 2023, you will see progressive changes to our website and materials as we roll out our new logo and enter a new phase of strategic planning to continue Clean Water for NC's important work!