

Leachate...from Page 1A

arrangement with a company co-owned by Steve Gooch, who represents Union County as a state senator.

Treated leachate is released with the rest of the city's effluent into Butternut Creek, which flows into the Nottely River before ending up in Lake Nottely, where a great many county residents receive their drinking water and spend time recreationally.

Recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency testing at LNIA's request showed the presence of PFAS in treated wastewater released into the creek, though PFAS amounts were too low to be detected elsewhere in the water system, including directly downstream of the treatment facility.

In her comments, Lively expressed concerns about these "forever chemicals" accumulating in the water system over time to adversely affect future generations of county residents, and she wondered if the city had taken these same concerns into account prior to agreeing to process the leachate.

Lively commended water quality monitoring organization MountainTrue for its local testing efforts but said that the range of testing needed to be expanded, as the current testing regime was not checking for hundreds of unregulated harmful chemicals.

She also contested Paris' prior refutations that leachate was not a county problem, asking that the commissioner intervene to stop its treatment locally to prevent harmful chemicals from being "dumped" into the source of many residents' drinking water.

Next up, resident Tim Pollack – also an LNIA member – shared his concerns regarding the recently published notice of the draft permit for the renewal application of the Blairsville Wastewater Treatment Plant's permit.

The draft permit appears to contain an expanded flow allowance of 1 million gallons per day, up from 400,000 gallons a day. Such a large increase is a red flag for many LNIA members, as the city has acknowledged it only releases about 250,000 gallons of treated wastewater a day now, leaving many association members questioning the need for such an expansion.

For its part, the city has said it is planning for future growth. LNIA members, however, remain skeptical, sharing in this and other recent public meetings their belief that current leachate levels are likely to be increased, despite the city's contention that it will never process more than it is currently.

Pollack also said the commissioner's messaging around addressing the future needs of the county should certainly apply to leachate processing, as "this is not an issue for this year or five years from now – this is an issue that will affect generations to come."

Continuing, Pollack reiterated that leachate treatment was very much a county issue – not just a city and Tennessee Valley Authority issue, as the commissioner has contended.

"Don't half the county residents get their drinking water from Lake Nottely?" Pollack said. "So, the health issues go well beyond the residents who have houses on Lake Nottely."

"Doesn't the existence



In last week's commission meeting, Carole Lively of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association delivered impassioned remarks against putting treated leachate to the water system.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

of the lake and the recreational use and the visitors that come here, and the businesses that come here – don't those affect the county?

"Doesn't the county's tax base improve because of the lake being a draw? What would happen if the lake had a reputation of being contaminated? If the lake died, does the county die? So, if you ask me, this is very much a county issue, and I'm hoping, commissioner, that you will take that up for us."

"We know you're not the City of Blairsville, but we also know you've been here working a long time, you probably have all kinds of contacts with both Sen. Gooch, with the City of Blairsville – I'm guessing you can apply some pressure or get the answers we're asking for."

Speaking third, MountainTrue Western Regional Director Callie Moore, formerly of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, addressed several items regarding local water quality and recent misconceptions about Butternut Creek.

For starters, she said E. coli has long been a concern in Butternut Creek, which is listed as one of the state's 303(d) impaired waters, and "has been ... as far back as 2012." Currently, Butternut Creek is unsafe for swimming, including where it flows through the Farmers Market and Meeks Park.

Moore said the high E. coli levels in the creek were not connected to leachate or wastewater treatment generally at the Blairsville facility, citing instead "livestock accessing streams, leaking in family septic systems ... (and) wildlife ... concentrated in certain areas in our watershed."

"MountainTrue is planning to develop a watershed plan for the Butternut Creek Watershed and get grant money to try to tackle these issues," Moore said. "Especially now that we have this updated ... data."

Added Moore, "I hope that is helpful with regard to the E. coli issue. The Wastewater Treatment Plant has not, in my 18 years here, ever contributed to the E. coli problem at Meeks Park."

In terms of the leachate, Moore contended that she "never said leachate is good for water quality," which is an impression she apparently gave some LNIA members following recent media interviews in the area.

"I have never said leachate is good for the lake," Moore said. "I'm sorry that anything that I have said has been interpreted that way."

As for potential remedies for LNIA's water quality concerns, Moore said MountainTrue had been "consulting with experts in leachate processing ... to do

some sampling" in the southern end of the lake, "in the narrow portion of the corridor."

"Not PFAs, because EPA sampled them and they were undetectable in the lake, but we're going to look into some of the metals and some of the other things," Moore said.

Discussing the expanded effluent capacity in the upcoming draft permit for the city's Wastewater Treatment Plant, Moore said MountainTrue had yet to arrive at a position but that she shared many of Pollack's concerns.

Additionally, Moore said that, regarding leachate, "initially, I was thinking we should put restrictions on Blairsville's permit."

"But what I found out about the leachate processing is that the landfill has to do a level of processing and treatment before they send the leachate to Blairsville," Moore said. "So, the other thing that we could do is have Blairsville renegotiate their agreement to limit the amount in what they're getting so that it doesn't just pass right through."

MountainTrue derives some of its funding through local governments in areas where it conducts water quality monitoring, including in Union County.

For his part, Paris said he cared about Lake Nottely, "and I care about the Lake Nottely Improvement Association, and I care about those people."

"But what I can't do is go around and holler at the City of Blairsville for doing something wrong when there's no evidence that they are doing something wrong," Paris said. "The City of Blairsville has a Georgia Environmental Protection Division permit to process their sewer."

Added Paris, "So, for (LNIA) to continue to try to put the pressure on me to fix this – there's got to be something to fix. You're saying there's something to fix, you're saying the chemicals are bad for the lake. They may be. And if they (are), I'm the first person that wants to get it fixed."

"But the Environmental Protection Division of the State of Georgia has to be on board to do that, and again, that's not me. That's you guys going to them and raising Cain and having them get fired up about it."

EPD will host a draft permit public hearing for the Blairsville Wastewater Treatment Plant via Zoom on Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. To attend, visit <https://gaepd.zoom.us/j/93369786212>.

For additional coverage of other business that occurred in the Aug. 20 county meeting, including an appearance by the Sons of the American Revolution, please pick up a copy of next week's edition of the newspaper.

Correction:

In the Aug. 19 edition of the North Georgia News, the newspaper printed an article containing an editing error that resulted in the incorrect identification of Woody Ham of Two Crows Farm as a man instead of a woman.

The mistake was brought to the newspaper's attention shortly after publication of the article, which featured an Aug. 15 interview with Ham at the Union County Farmers Market as she sold her products made from natural fibers harvested from the 65 alpacas on her sustainable farm in Murphy, North Carolina.

"The alpacas are born on our farm, and they can live out their entire lives (there)," Ham said in the interview. "We make all of our different products from all of the different parts of their fiber that we harvest."

"We have anything – from the yarn to make your own (items) to the ready-made scarves, gloves, hats, rugs, saddle pads, felted soap and anything else we can make. I actually have 10 local fiber artists that work with me and



Woody Ham at the Farmers Market selling her many fine products made from alpaca fibers harvested on her farm, Two Crows Farm.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

make these products." Ham and her many local alpaca products from Two Crows Farm can be found at the Farmers Market every Saturday between 7 a.m. and 1 p.m. For more information on her farm, visit <http://twocrowsalpacas.com>.

"Two Crows Farm

promotes the rural lifestyle, which for us, includes raising alpacas for their luxurious fiber," according to the website. "We invite you to come learn about raising livestock, processing yarn, growing your food and the sense of community that living in the country brings."



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