

From: [Nickie Sekera](#)
To: [Knuuti, Karen](#)
Subject: Public Comment on Public Benefit Determination Application for Juniper Ridge Landfill (DEP# S-020700-W5-CV-N)
Date: Thursday, September 5, 2024 11:51:54 PM

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Greetings Commissioner Loyzim, Karen Knuuti and the DEP,

My name is Nickie Sekera and I am a cofounder of Community Water Justice and a journalist with Sunlight Media Collective.

I testified in person in July against the expansion of the Juniper Ridge Landfill but also wanted to submit a written comment. I ask that in the 10 years remaining on Casella's current operation agreement, the obligations of Casella to operate Juniper Ridge Landfill in full compliance with improvements- and without significant violation is requested, prior to any consideration of expansion.

According to the Bureau of General Services filed reports, of all the complaints about Juniper Ridge, 56 were formally documented in 2023 to Casella (NEWSME Landfill Operations, LLC) from residents regarding Juniper Ridge Landfill operations. That appears too many to grant an expansion without significant improvements.

On May 15th of last year, at around 8:00pm a friend was driving home southbound on Interstate 95 and mentioned on social media that Juniper Ridge had caught on fire. Crews from Bradley, Alton, Old Town and Hudson responded to the scene around that same time. Being not far away, a couple of colleagues and I drove nearby the site to document what was happening. The fire, which at this point covered a couple acres in size and with a significant column of billowing smoke, stood out against the night sky.

The wind was blowing between 5-6 miles per hour that evening, in an eastward direction. (What additional harm would there have been with winds of 15, 25 or more mph?) Though I was positioned north and upwind of the fire, the ash and odor (gas) had saturated the air. There were workers nearby who were standing guard at the entrance to guide emergency vehicles entering the facility. These workers and drivers were wearing no protection from the initial fallout of the fire. My colleagues and I had surgical grade masks, which were largely inefficient to protect us, but at least filtered the larger airborne particles.

After my camera caught the density of particulate matter in the air from the light cast from one of the workers' trucks, we decided it would be best for our health to leave. (See attached photo.) My eyes were watering at this point. We noted that our bodies and cars were coated with ash as we were leaving the area.

The ash carrying toxins was deposited downwind, and onto Penobscot Nation's Reservation lands and waters, and surrounding residential areas. This happened during the annual fiddle-head harvest season, a cultural practice of Wabanaki people that provides critical sustenance needs, a food that many people enjoy as an important natural and local food. Critical natural foodways as this are worthy of heightened protection and again represent a long standing rural economic mainstay and culturally important nourishment. Our bodies and environment we depend upon are being expected to absorb the harmful impacts of this landfill and such externalities are not acceptable and violate the BGS service agreement and DEP legal obligations.

The Juniper Ridge Landfill office (NEWSME Landfill Operations, LLC) in Alton referred Sunlight Media requests to Casella Waste Systems communications contact at their central office in Vermont, saying, "they are not at liberty to answer any questions". The Old Town Fire Department also said we should contact Juniper Ridge Landfill (Casella), and that they "have no comment regarding the matter." It would be reasonable to expect that our public service officials would be supported in advising the public on health and safety, and the means to protect us from the rising threats associated with a volatile landfill. It is troublesome that our first responders are not equipped

to assist in effective public safety during such an incident.

No warnings were issued to the public about the health hazards of landfill fires - neither at the time it was happening nor since. It's not a matter if another fire will happen but when, as the underlying problems that created the fire have yet to be addressed.

The Bureau of General Services and the Department of Environmental Protection has an obligation to the people of the state to ensure that the management and operations of Juniper Ridge is centered on public health and safety and supports the State's Waste Hierarchy to its fullest extent. We also have an obligation to put the services contract out to bid before an extension and expansion, in due diligence. I ask again that this expansion is rejected until these obligations have been fulfilled.

Thank you for your time,

Nickie Sekera
Fryeburg and Eddington, ME

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