

Sewage spraying plans halted

White River School District reverses course following health warning

MIKE ARCHBOLD; The News Tribune
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Neighbors and environmentalists are celebrating victory after the White River School District announced this week it won't allow millions of gallons of septic tank waste to be sprayed on its tree farm land above the Carbon River.

The district's about-face followed a letter from the state Department of Health to the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department indicating that Cascade Northwest Inc.'s plans to spray lime-stabilized septic tank waste that they call septage could pose a human health hazard.

"I'm elated, of course," said Jill Cartwright, one of the leaders of the up to 300 people in the Carbonado, Wilkeson and Buckley areas who came together to oppose the project after it became public in October.

"I'm going to follow up on this," she said. "I've learned a lot (about this spraying practice) and it's not enough to keep it out of our neighborhoods."

Cascade Northwest Inc. of Puyallup, parent company of Honey Bucket and Flohawks, a septic tank cleaning company, proposed to spray up to 6 million gallons a year of the partially treated waste on 1,300 acre of forest land above the Carbon River.

It would have been the first commercial spraying of septic tank waste on forest lands in Pierce County.

Cascade Northwest couldn't be reached Thursday for comment.

In a letter, Jolyn Leslie, the state's regional engineer for drinking water operations, recommended "strongly" against the project. She said the watershed in the Town of Carbonado would be susceptible to runoff from the waste.

The material contains "organisms that can make people sick," Leslie wrote, and spraying it in the watershed "significantly increases the risk of waterborne disease."

School Superintendent Tom Lockyer said the district will notify Cascade Northwest and other county and state agencies that they will not longer pursue the project.

Lockyer read a statement at the district board's meeting Wednesday.

The district had said many times it would withdraw its support for the project if any public agency indicated spraying was unsafe, Lockyer said.

The decision was greeted by a standing ovation from members of Friends of Carbon Canyon in the audience who had fought to stop the project, according to Danny White of Carbonado, an outspoken opponent of the project.

White, who has served on the School Board, added that he hopes this will lead to ongoing cooperation between Carbon River communities and the School District on matters such as bond issues.

Cascade Northwest proposed to pay the district roughly \$60,000 a year to use its land. The company had applied to the state Department of Ecology and the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department for a permit.

Spraying of septic tank waste is allowed elsewhere in the state, including in Mason and Lewis counties. Cascade Northwest was allowed the past two years to research spraying techniques in the University of Washington's Pack Forest near Eatonville.

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