

WildLaw

A nonprofit organization providing legal and technical services to protect our land and people

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October 15, 2009

**Stanley Meiburg, Acting Regional Administrator,
EPA Region 4, Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center,
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I am the Alabama Organizing Coordinator for WildLaw, but I have lived in Lowndes County, Alabama for the past 20 years. I led the struggle to keep a regional landfill off the US Civil Rights Trail in Lowndes County. It took 10 years before Waste Management finally gave up in 2006. We asked Region 4 for help on numerous occasions, citing President Clinton's Executive Order. We believed it was unthinkable that a low income county that was 85% African American, and one of the poorest counties in the country, would be singled out for a landfill that would have destroyed tourism in our area. Because of the historic Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March in 1965, our county was slated for a federally funded Civil Rights Interpretive Center, and plans were underway to develop Highway 80, the site of the proposed landfill.

Three years ago, another landfill fight erupted, but this time our local County Commission voted not to approve the application.

It was the landfill struggles that prepared me for my work with WildLaw. Part of my work has been the ADEM Reform Coalition, which published a work showing how the majority of Alabama's landfills are located in communities of color. During my three years with WildLaw, I have worked to keep hog farms, chemical plants and landfills out of low income residential areas.

I wrote Administrator Lisa Jackson about the situation in Perry County, Alabama in August and got a letter from Region 4 assuring me everything was safe and great with the coal ash dumping. In fact, Region 4 staff came to Perry County last month and together with ADEM and the Perry County Commission, assured us that the African American residents who live just across the street from the landfill would be safe. EPA staff did say they were revisiting whether or not EPA would rule the coal ash toxic, but of course, it is

a bit late for that. Worse than that, your staff participated in this “public” meeting where people from nearby counties were not allowed to ask questions. In fact, the local District Attorney was denied the right to ask a question.

As you know, Alabama is one of those states with very weak environmental laws. One can compare our lack of environmental protection with the lack of civil rights protection of the past. In 1965, we had to have help from the Federal Government to end segregation and to help our communities get the right to vote.

We need that same federal assistance with environmental protection. We all know that low income communities of color are sitting ducks for those who seek homes for the nation’s waste and mistakes. Desperate for revenue, some local governments can be made to believe anything is safe.

My complaint is that Region 4 has never heard us, the low income communities of color who are at constant risk. Environmental racism is alive and well, and in the 15 years I have been working for environmental justice, I have not seen any help from Region 4. Letters, excuses, assurances are not environmental protection.

Thank you.

Barbara Evans
Community Organizing Coordinator