



For Immediate Release

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**Environmental Rights Vindicated in Sludge Dumping Case
Synagro Withdraws Plan to Dump Sewage Sludge on Farm Lands Near
Special Protection Watershed**

***Delaware Riverkeeper Network & Sludge Free Upper Mt. Bethel Challenged Sludge
Dumping Approval as Violation of Law and Constitutional Environmental Rights***

Upper Mount Bethel, Northampton County, PA – In a letter filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (“PA DEP”), Synagro MidAtlantic (“Synagro”), a biosolids management company, has withdrawn plans to dump sewage sludge on three farms located in Upper Mount Bethel Township, Northampton County, PA.

The Delaware Riverkeeper Network and Sludge Free Upper Mt. Bethel (Sludge Free “UMBT”) have been challenging the proposal to dump sewage on the Potomac, Sunrise, and Stone Church Farms since the PADEP gave the proposal a green light in 2013. The Delaware Riverkeeper Network, Sludge Free UMBT and local residents challenged PADEP’s approval of the application of the sewage sludge on the farms because of concerns for ground water contamination, contamination of drinking water wells, polluted runoff entering the Allegheny Creek, damage to exceptional value wetlands and endangered species (blue-spotted salamanders – a PA designated endangered species), and asserted that the PA DEP did not give the Synagro proposal the hard look that Article I Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution and state regulations require.

Said **Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper**, of the most recent turn of events in the case, “Synagro’s withdrawal of its plan to dump sewage sludge and PA DEP’s declaration of its previous approval as null and void, is a clear concession by PADEP and Synagro that these sites and watersheds are not appropriate for sewage sludge dumping and that PADEP would not be able to defend its approval of the plan as being in compliance with the law. “

van Rossum explains further: “Through the discovery process and the reports of expert witnesses, we established what we had stated in the appeal, which is that these sites are not suitable for Class B biosolids. In its July 2015 decision allowing this appeal to proceed to trial, the Environmental Hearing Board recognized the validity of the issues we have been raising. Trial was scheduled to start the second week of January, 2016, and the parties were supposed to be preparing pre-trial filings for submittal within the month. The withdrawal now reflects that PADEP and Synagro have concluded that it was better to back down and abandon their plans than face trial. “

On December 23, 2013 the PA DEP issued site suitability determination letters that allowed Synagro to dump sewage sludge on the three farms located in Upper Mount Bethel, PA. The approval was quickly challenged before the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board.

On July 1, 2015 the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board rejected motions by PADEP and Synagro, to issue a partial summary judgment, allowing the case to proceed to trial. The EHB found that there was “more than sufficient evidence to defeat summary judgment” and that “[t]he Appellants have clearly set forth specific facts in the record that show there is a genuine issue for a hearing.”

Another win for Upper Mount Bethel Township in their fight against sewage sludge, is a contract entered into between local farmer Paul Smith and “Help the Farmer, Heal the Land”. According to spokesperson John Birmingham, “In the contract, Mr. Smith was awarded 1,059 bushels of free cover crop seeds in return for agreeing to not spread sewage sludge of any kind on 353 acres of farmland, including the **three sites at issue in the Legal Appeal**. Help the Farmer, Heal the Land is a community initiative started in 2014, to acknowledge farmers’ stewardship of our shared resources – our land, water and air. Help the Farmer, Heal the Land gives free cover crop seeds, often referred to as ‘green manures’ to farmers in exchange for their pledge to not use sewage sludge. To date, Help the Farmer, Heal the Land has signed contracts with three farmers (which encompasses almost 600 acres of farmland in Upper Mount Bethel Township) all pledging to not spread any type of sewage sludge on lands that they farm.”

A spokesman for Sludge Free UMBT, John Gorman stated, "We are grateful for the support of our neighbors and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network. We could never have kept sludge out of our community without their help. This is truly a David versus Goliath story."

Sewage sludge can contain contaminants ranging from a broad array of pathogens and heavy metals to pharmaceutical, steroidal, and flame retardant compounds. All three of the farm sites drain into the Allegheny Creek, which flows into a section of the Delaware River designated as Special Protection Waters by the DRBC. Some of the farm sites also drain into the River directly and/or into other tributary streams. The farm sites also drain into neighboring and nearby wetlands.

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