

Thursday, February 15, 2024

Kat Taylor - Testimony against Juniper Ridge Landfill expansion and extension of Casella's Operating Service Agreement.

Waste management is a highly lucrative enterprise when it should be an **essential, non-profit public service**. 20 years ago for-profit Casella was the only applicant bidding to operate what was then known as the West Old Town Landfill (WOTL). No one thought the newly named state-owned landfill, Juniper Ridge, would be a money maker...except Casella.

In 2022 Casella took in over **\$1 billion**.

*"For fiscal year 2022, **revenues** were **\$1,085.1 million, up \$195.9 million, or up 22.0%, from fiscal year 2021.***

***Net income** was **\$53.1 million**, or \$1.03 per diluted common share, for fiscal year **2022**, as compared to **net income of \$41.1 million**, or \$0.80 per diluted common share, **for fiscal year 2021.**"*

<https://ir.casella.com/news-releases/news-release-details/casella-waste-systems-inc-announces-fourth-quarter-and-fiscal-15>

*"Casella Waste Systems has a **market cap or net worth** of **\$4.97 billion** as of **February 2, 2024.***

*Its market cap has **increased by 20.40% in one year.**"*

<https://stockanalysis.com/stocks/cwst/market-cap/>

Some have said that JRL operates at "*no cost to the state of Maine*". What a missed opportunity the last 20 years has been for the state by abdicating control of JRL, the least desirable rung on the state's waste hierarchy ladder, to a for-profit operator. When simply by cutting out investors we could have had more than enough money to provide waste diversion options for every region in Maine.

Instead we tolerated Casella hiding its contractual agreements, refusing to answer questions at hearings and work sessions, failing to treat leachate before disposal through Nine Dragons into the Penobscot River, because ... they don't have to. Their contract with Maine does not include transparency in their business dealings nor responsible stewardship for the environment.

Casella has legions of lawyers and lobbyists, who work tirelessly to find weaknesses in rules that allow them to, while not actually breaking the rules, bend them to their profit until citizen activists finally manage, after years of hard work, to close the loopholes. Then they get extensions, waivers, and expansions to accommodate the importation and commodification of out-of-state waste from New England.

Why, since doing business with Casella is so time consuming and difficult, are we even considering extending our contract with them? Why would we want to spend more time with a partner who, while following the letter of the law, ignores the spirit?

The resources that have been wasted, in landfill capacity, lost revenue, state staff involvement and citizen activists, fighting Casella's efforts to bypass waste to landfill, cannot be calculated.

Can we still say having them as operators of our only state-owned landfill has been at "*no cost to the state of Maine*"?

There is no longer a shortage of businesses from which Maine could source talent in the state or regional operation of all materials management services, including regional landfills. If there were no investors to placate, Maine could reinvest MSW revenue back into materials management to start expanding our waste water treatment facilities to include de-watering and PFAS treatment of WWTS and provide funding to regions and municipalities to improve local waste diversion efforts which would not be burdened by the overwhelming amount of out-of-state waste that is pushing JRL beyond its limits.

Let Casella's contract at JRL expire. No extension. No expansion. The remaining capacity at JRL is estimated to be exhausted in 4 years: 2028. **At the critical mass point, close JRL to new waste and keep Casella on for closing and covering** another 6 years *at no cost to the state*.

The employees at JRL do a good job. I'd be willing to bet the personnel from JRL would be happy to continue working under state or regional supervision. It would be foolish of the state to lay off qualified employees that are familiar with JRL and its vulnerabilities.

Meanwhile, the state should be looking to the future in site planning for MM facilities and support state efforts, like the *Maine Materials Management Task Force* <https://www.maine.gov/future/future/initiatives/climate/climate-council/materials-management-task-force> , that span the years, rather than having to start from scratch briefing new committee members on Materials Management every session.

The state acquisition of the Jay facility, with its adjacent waste water treatment plant, and possibly the Bucksport landfill, buys Maine time to get caught up treating WWTS and leachate from landfills for PFAS and other toxic chemicals. Having alternative state owned and operated landfills buys us breathing room to initiate new waste diversion programs regionally and leverage to end our contract with Casella.

Rather than planning on staying in a one-sided dysfunctional partnership, we should take advantage of the next 10 years to prepare for Juniper Ridge's eventual closure and expand waste diversion efforts in other areas.

Maine simply cannot keep putting all our eggs in one basket with Materials Management by having only one publicly owned landfill, or count on the success of MRC's Municipal Waste Solutions facility, or the GRACE facility since they have years yet to be fully operational...if ever.

And we cannot continue to have contracts with for-profit landfill operators who import waste to improve their bottom line and stock value.

We have a little time and leverage.
Let's not waste it.

Otherwise we will see the iconic landscape of Maine change from this



Mt. Katahdin

To this



Juniper Ridge Landfill 2023 – as seen from Route 16 West Old Town

When is big, *too* big? We must do better.

Kat Taylor
Argyle Twp.