



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

Heart of Illinois Group  P.O. Box 3593, Peoria, IL 61614

Contact: Joyce Blumenshine
309-688-0950
cell 309-678-1011

Traci Barkley
Prairie Rivers Network
217-344-2371

Brenda Dilts
Canton Area Citizens for
Environmental Issues
309-649-1938

Press Release

For Release Friday, Dec. 11, 2009

300 Water Permit Violations at Coal Strip Mine

Groups File Notice to Sue Over Years of Pollution

Sierra Club, Prairie Rivers Network, and Environmental Law and Policy Center have filed a notice of intent to sue Freeman United Coal Mining Company, regarding repeated and excessive violations of the Clean Water Act. The Industry Mine, near Macomb, has over 300 documented exceedances of their NPDES permit since July, 2003.

"According to Freeman Coal's own reports, the Industry mine has broken the law hundreds of times in the last five years, with over sixty violations through August of this year," said Joyce Blumenshine, Heart of Illinois Group Sierra Club. "If every one of those violations were prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, Freeman Coal would be forced to pay several million dollars in fines. Our goal is to see them comply with the law and operate the mine in a responsible way that is safe for local residents."

The strip mine is located southwest of Macomb, in an area that was once the largest remaining contiguous woodland in McDonough County. Part of the mine is also in Schuyler County. Documentation from the mine shows frequent discharges of wastewater with illegal levels of pollutants, including manganese,

Industry Mine 300 Water Permit Violations

total suspended solids, sulfates, iron, and acidic water. This is in violation of the federal Clean Water Act and the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for the mine. Failed reporting and monitoring requirements have also been documented.

"The pollution being released from the coal mining operation can cause streams to become acidic, killing fish and other stream animals," says Traci Barkley, Water Resources Scientist with Prairie Rivers Network. "Some pollution can even suffocate insects on which fish, birds and wildlife depend. The whole stream can become degraded, not just the stretch where the pollution is occurring." There are concerns that downstream water quality can also be impacted for wildlife or communities that depend on the water. High levels of manganese can cause neurological damage in humans, and has been linked to Parkinson's Disease.

The pollutants have gone into three area streams and various tributaries. Grindstone Creek, which was designated previously as having impaired water quality due to sulfates, has received illegal levels of contaminants. The mine violated a special permit condition that was intended by state agencies to protect the stream from further degradation.

"All the the good intent and promises of state agencies saying that permits will protect the environment are useless if those permits are not enforced. The length of time these illegal discharges have gone on is particularly troubling," comments Brenda Dilts, Chair, Canton Area Citizens for Environmental Issues. The Canton citizens group has raised repeated concerns about the proposed North Canton coal strip mine, which will have mine water outfalls into a creek feeding Canton Lake, the public water supply for over 20,000 people.

#