



Press Conference Statement

Murdock Mine, Douglas County, Illinois

October 10, 2012

Good afternoon. My name is Traci Barkley. I work as a Water Resources Scientist with the Prairie Rivers Network. Prairie Rivers Network is a non-profit organization that strives to protect clean water and healthy rivers with and on behalf of Illinois citizens. I have worked with Prairie Rivers Network for over six years to protect and conserve clean water. Over the last three years, I have been spending a large portion of my time working with residents of coalfield communities, to prevent or limit the negative impacts from coal mining to clean water. My work also involves trying to identify ways to fix ongoing problems resulting from mining practices.

In Illinois, many of the damages to the land, water and communities hosting underground coal mines can unfortunately be predicted. The land above where the coal is being removed will collapse or subside at some point. Neighbors will be bothered by blowing coal dust, increased noise and constant truck or rail traffic. Huge amounts of water from nearby supplies will be used to wash the coal. And large amounts of coal waste will be left behind in piles or coal slurry will remain in huge impoundments, threatening underlying groundwater.

But what we have here at the old Murdock Mine is unprecedented and in fact, I first heard of this site when referenced as a worst case scenario. In the Spring of 2010 when meeting with residents of Vermilion County regarding their concerns with a newly proposed coal mine, one of the neighbors expressed that she did not want "anything like Murdock left in her community". Not knowing what this meant, I decided to go find out. It didn't take long for me to understand what this resident meant and to find nearby neighbors that knew all too well the struggle of living next to a polluting site.

You see what has been happening here is landfilling of municipal and industrial waste in the old coal slurry impoundment under the guise of "reclamation". This site contains a coarse refuse pile and some impoundments that were used for disposal of the fine coal waste material from the coal washing process. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources- Office of Mines and Minerals has permitted Alpena Vision Resources to "reclaim" the 178 acres of this site with coal waste materials and to use biosolids as the final cover. What has actually happened is the dumping of hundreds of thousands of tons of coal ash, lime sludge from water treatment plants, and sewage solids that have contributed to years of nuisance and polluting conditions for neighbors.

One of the neighbors has witnessed coal ash clouds so thick, cars have had to stop on the road. A visit to the site in the summer of 2010 for stream sampling found a recent mussel kill in the stream 1/2 mile downstream of the dump; every fingernail clam seen was open and dead. Ash coated the surface of the stream and its banks. Last winter, Prairie Rivers Network found thick clumps of sludge material in the stream with very



thick growths of algae and sewage fungus growing for at least ½ mile downstream of where Alpena Vision Resources discharges into a tributary of Brushy Fork. Most of last year, foul odors were so bad that some residents felt housebound or would gag when outside. Our stream monitoring downstream and adjacent to the site found high concentrations of sulfates, boron, iron, manganese, arsenic, and nutrients. Several households are downgradient of the unlined coal ash dump site and draw their water from wells finished in the sand and gravel lenses that lie only ten to forty feet below the surface. Some have stopped drinking their water fear of what might be in it.

Residents have been reporting these foul conditions to the Illinois EPA for years now. Over a dozen citizen complaints have been filed regarding offensive stream conditions, fugitive coal ash dust causing difficulty breathing and poor visibility, odors that degraded day to day quality of life. Prairie Rivers Network has submitted site condition reports, water quality sampling results, extensive photo documentation and resident testimonials to the regulators. Limited inspections have taken place, noting some problems with stockpiling of sewage sludge and poor management practices. Finally, Illinois EPA did issue a Notice of Violation this past Spring due to air pollution violations and subsequently sewage solids are no longer being accepted on site.

This is progress for these residents but it is not enough. The agencies charged with inspecting the mine and enforcing the regulations have failed to take appropriate enforcement action. This “landfilling” without a permit and ongoing air and pollution violations must stop. And that is why we are here today. To announce that last week, due to the urging of residents and advocates alike, the Attorney General filed a complaint against Alpena Vision Resources before the Illinois Pollution Control Board, seeking fines and for the Board to withdraw the mine’s waste disposal permits. <CLAP>

We are fortunate to have Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan step up against serial polluters like Alpena Vision Resources in order to protect these folks’ water, land and the quality of life each of us deserves. At this point, I’d like to introduce Jeri, long term neighbor to this site and one of the folks who has not given up hope that these issues can and will be resolved. Jeri?

There are other neighbors here today including **XX, XX and XX**. They will be available for questions and answers in just a moment after a quick announcement.

There will be a public meeting hosted by Representative Chapin Rose and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency for concerned residents regarding ongoing pollution at this site. It will be held tomorrow, Thursday, October 11 at 2p at the Murdock Community Center.