INTRODUCTION:
Nobody wants a landfill in their backyard, especially when that backyard is as wet as Brantley County. The Satilla River cradles the county. Though it is only about 30 miles wide, Brantley is home to 109 miles of the Satilla River. An estimated 16 percent of the county’s land is considered wetlands and more than 20 percent of the county’s population of 19,000 lives in flood susceptible areas. Even the local high school mascot is the heron—the dominant wading bird of Georgia’s rivers. Water and garbage shouldn’t mix, but for the past six years Brantley County Development Partners, LLC, has pursued a 463-acre landfill project located about two miles from the Satilla River, situated in a large pine wetland laced with cypress and tupelo trees. Earlier this year, Georgia environmental regulators deemed the site appropriate for a landfill, despite significant opposition. Local leaders, state legislators and citizens continue to oppose the project, voicing concerns ranging from pollution of groundwater and surface water to the risk of increased flooding.

THE WATER BODY:
The Satilla River is one of Georgia’s premiere blackwater rivers. Its water stained the color of tea from naturally occurring tannins, the Satilla drains some 4,000 square miles of land in Southeast Georgia, flowing more than 200 miles from Ben Hill County to St. Andrews Sound in Camden County at the northern tip of Cumberland Island. It is renowned for its redbreast sunfish fishery and is home to the Satilla River Water Trail, a recreational boating trail with developed access points spanning about 150 miles. For Brantley County, the Satilla, with its forested lowlands, blackwater and white sand bars defines the rural character of the area and is one of the region’s most treasured natural places.

THE DIRT:
In an attempt to stop the proposed landfill in its tracks, Sen. William Ligon who represents Brantley County, introduced a measure during the 2020 legislative session that would prohibit landfills within three miles of any blackwater river in Georgia’s Coastal Plain. In support of the legislation, he said “They want to put a landfill in an area that is surrounded by wetlands. You don’t put your trash can in the middle of your living room.”
The legislation sailed through the Senate and stalled in the House, but Brantley County residents couldn’t agree more with their senator’s sentiments. During the initial permitting process for the project, Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) received 9,517 comments from interested parties. All but three expressed opposition to the project.

Yet despite these comments and the high profile opposition, in May EPD deemed the site suitable for a landfill. Now, the company must meet several requirements set out in the site suitability notice and submit additional operation plans to EPD for final approval.

Meanwhile, Brantley County officials and local residents continue to fight the project. While a previous county commission and county manager endorsed the landfill through questionable actions, a commission elected in 2016 has taken a different stand. The new commission adopted a revised Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) and voted to rezone the property in question, actions that would prevent construction of the landfill. The moves prompted landfill developers to sue the county.

With two elementary schools located near the landfill, the Brantley County School Board also weighed in on the issue, adopting a resolution opposing the project.

The risks to local residents and the landscape that defines their community are real.

While Brantley County Development Partners contend the property to be used for the landfill would not impact flood prone areas, aerial footage shot by Satilla Riverkeeper earlier this year shows acres of standing water on the property.

Because the water table in the region sits, in some cases, just a foot or less below the land’s surface, the landfilled material and cover will be built upward from the land’s surface, filling low lying areas and potentially causing flooding in nearby areas to be more severe.

The closeness of the water table also increases the risks of groundwater contamination, a point of concern for local residents who depend on private wells for their water supplies. The landfill borders a residential neighborhood that has more than 250 residential lots.

Aside from these threats, there is no local need for an additional landfill. According to EPD, two nearby regional landfills have a combined remaining capacity of 115 years.

**WHAT MUST BE DONE:**

The Brantley County Commission should continue to oppose the project, and EPD should deny the solid waste handling permit for the project because the proposed landfill site is not suitable for the disposal of solid waste and the project is not consistent with Brantley County’s SWMP.

For More Information Contact:
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