

Press Release

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Abandoned Mine Site Continues to Pollute Locust Fork of Black Warrior River *Conservation Groups Pushing for Proper Treatment of Acidic Runoff and Mining Waste*

Birmingham, AL— Conservation groups filed a notice of intent to sue today against Drummond Company for violations at its Maxine Mine site, an abandoned underground coal mine located on the banks of the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River near Praco, Alabama. Though mining at Maxine Mine ceased in the 1980s, acid mine drainage has been illegally discharging from the site into the Locust Fork through surface water runoff and seeps from the underground mine for years.

The Southern Environmental Law Center, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, and Public Justice filed the notice letter regarding continuous and unpermitted polluted discharges of acidic runoff and mine drainage into the Locust Fork and its tributaries. The site also presents a substantial imminent harm to human health and the environment due to the storage of tons of mining waste known as geologic overburden, or “GOB,” on a bluff above the Locust Fork. Besides being a continuous source of acid mine drainage, the GOB has completely filled a tributary of the Locust Fork.

“Leaving this site without cleaning up piles of mining waste and polluted sediment, and without taking appropriate measures to stop the flow of acid mine drainage from the basins and ditches left behind is simply unacceptable,” said Barry Brock, senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center. “Until the ongoing pollution at the Maxine Mine site is adequately addressed, it continues to pose a threat to water quality, and the communities and wildlife in the area that depend on clean water.”

The site currently consists of underground mine works, surface piles of mining waste, and a system of man-made drainage ditches and earthen dams used to create sediment basins for runoff from the waste piles. The basins are continuously leaking polluted water and the dams are holding acidic coal mine drainage and GOB. The main dam by the river is deteriorating and could potentially breach, resulting in a large release of pollutants into the Locust Fork, a primary tributary of the Black Warrior River and a popular area for fishing, boating and other forms of outdoor recreation.

The Maxine Mine site is one of the worst of hundreds of abandoned mines in the Black Warrior basin, many of which continue to degrade streams and contaminate groundwater with unpermitted discharges containing high levels of sediment, heavy metals such as iron and aluminum, and other pollutants.

To address the ongoing pollution and storage of coal mine waste on the Locust Fork, the groups are seeking removal of the mining waste, excavation and/or remediation of contaminated streams, and any other appropriate measures by Drummond to immediately stop all illegal discharges at the site.

“Polluted water from Maxine Mine’s old underground mine and coal waste piles has been flowing into the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River for far too long,” said Nelson Brooke of Black Warrior

Riverkeeper. “The acidic runoff at this long-ignored site is laden with high concentrations of heavy metals unfit for fish and aquatic wildlife and human health.”

“The Maxine Mine site is a striking reminder of the pervasive and long-lasting impacts of coal mining,” said Richard Webster, Environmental Enforcement Project Attorney with Public Justice. “Acid mine drainage and runoff continue to threaten streams and groundwater in the area. Drummond has a responsibility to clean up the mess unleashed by mining operations at the site, and the notice filed today is an urgent effort to compel the company to take action now.”

As outlined in the notice letter, the groups’ claims include violations of the Clean Water Act through illegal, ongoing discharges of pollutants into the Locust Fork and its tributaries, and illegal stream filling; and violations of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act for improper management of solid wastes.

[Click here to read the notice letter.](#)

[Click here to view a](#) high-resolution photograph of orange-stained acid mine drainage and polluted runoff from Maxine Mine entering the Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River. (© Nelson Brooke)

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About Southern Environmental Law Center:

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a regional nonprofit using the power of the law to protect the health and environment of the Southeast (Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama). Founded in 1986, SELC’s team of nearly 60 legal and policy experts represent more than 100 partner groups on issues of climate change and energy, air and water quality, forests, the coast and wetlands, transportation, and land use.

www.SouthernEnvironment.org

About Black Warrior Riverkeeper:

Black Warrior Riverkeeper is a citizen-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. We are advocates for clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities throughout the Black Warrior River watershed. To learn about the river and threats to it, visit BlackWarriorRiver.org

About Public Justice:

Public Justice pursues high impact lawsuits to combat social and economic injustice, protect the Earth’s sustainability, and challenge predatory corporate conduct and government abuses. For more information, visit www.PublicJustice.net.