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Birmingham's Two Breweries Ask the University of Alabama to Stop the Shepherd Bend Mine

Today, Birmingham craft beer manufacturers [Avondale Brewing Company](#) and [Good People Brewing Company](#) both sent letters to Dr. Robert E. Witt, President of The University of Alabama (UA), asking UA to stop the [Shepherd Bend Mine](#) from potentially polluting Birmingham's water supply. UA is a major owner of land and mineral rights covered by the mining company Shepherd Bend, LLC for a proposed coal mine on the Black Warrior River's Mulberry Fork in Walker County. The 1,773-acre strip mine would discharge wastewater 800 feet across the river from a Birmingham Water Works Board intake facility providing tap water daily to 200,000 Birmingham-area residents.

The two breweries, separate businesses, happily agreed to collaborate by simultaneously endorsing the position of Black Warrior Riverkeeper, a nonprofit organization opposing the mine due to its potential danger to Birmingham's water supply and the river's ecology. The beer manufacturers are concerned that sediment and heavy metals discharged from the mine would lead to decreased water quality and increased filtration fees – a cost that the Birmingham Water Works Board may have to pass on to consumers, including these two water-intensive breweries.

Numerous scientists, civil rights and environmental organizations, UA alumni, faculty and students, and governments, including the [Birmingham City Council](#), have implored UA not to lease or sell their land and minerals to Shepherd Bend, LLC, which is owned by Garry N. Drummond, a Trustee Emeritus of UA. Spokespersons from UA have repeatedly stated that the University has “no current plans” on the matter, and “has not been approached” by the mining company.

Meanwhile, Shepherd Bend, LLC has applied for and obtained a wastewater discharge permit from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. Black Warrior Riverkeeper and the Southern Environmental Law Center are legally challenging that permit, which covers a large area of land and mineral rights currently held by UA. Without leases for UA's significant land and mineral holdings, it may not be practical for the mining company to commence activity at Shepherd Bend.

Black Warrior Riverkeeper's Executive Director, Charles Scribner, is grateful that both breweries chose to oppose the mine publicly. “Birmingham's two breweries are crucially highlighting the fact that the Shepherd Bend Mine would not only threaten the river and drinking water, but also popular local businesses,” Scribner said. “It is time for UA to state that they will never lease or sell property for mining so close to a drinking water facility serving Alabama's largest city.”

To read Avondale Brewing Company's letter, [click here](#).

To read Good People Brewing Company's letter, [click here](#).

To view an aerial photo of Shepherd Bend by Nelson Brooke, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, showing the water intake facility (top), the Black Warrior River's Mulberry Fork (middle) and the proposed mine site (bottom), [click here](#).

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Black Warrior Riverkeeper (blackwarriorriver.org) is a citizen-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. A member of Waterkeeper Alliance, Black Warrior Riverkeeper was the Alabama Environmental Council's 2007 Conservation Organization of the Year and the American Canoe Association's 2008 Green Paddle Award winner. Nelson Brooke, Riverkeeper, won the Alabama Rivers Alliance's 2010 River Hero Award. In 2011 the Black Warrior became one of America's [Most Endangered Rivers](#) due to coal pollution.