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Lands Unsuitable for Coal Mining Petition: Public Hearing on February 20

Jasper, Ala. – The Alabama Surface Mining Commission (ASMC) will hold a public hearing on Thursday, February 20 on appeals of Black Warrior Riverkeeper’s [Lands Unsuitable for Coal Mining Petition](#). The hearing will start at 10:00 AM in the Activity Room of the Community Health Systems Building ([204 19th St. East #100 - Jasper, AL 35501](#)).

On October 28, 2013, the ASMC refused to declare 40,300 acres of land adjacent to the Mulberry Fork of the Black Warrior River as off limits to coal mining, missing a historic opportunity to protect the drinking water source for 200,000 residents in the greater Birmingham area. Black Warrior Riverkeeper and the Birmingham Water Works Board (BWVB) each appealed that decision in separate filings on November 26, 2013. The purpose of the upcoming public hearing is to hear those appeals, although Birmingham area drinking water consumers and concerned citizens can sign up to speak onsite prior to the beginning of the hearing.

Black Warrior Riverkeeper filed a petition with the ASMC on September 10, 2012 to designate this area as unsuitable for coal mining under a provision of the Alabama Surface Mining Control & Reclamation Act, which was specifically enacted to preserve public resources like tap water. The designation should be applied when surface mining could result in a substantial loss or reduction in the long range productivity of the water supply.

Black Warrior Riverkeeper submitted public comments and evidence to support their petition, including an analysis of BWVB water quality data as well as preliminary data recently compiled by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. The results of this analysis conclusively demonstrate that even after reclamation occurs, surface coal mining has persistent negative effects on downstream water quality.

Citing concerns about potential treatment cost hikes or even an inability to treat the water under certain circumstances, the BWVB intervened in the petition process to represent their concerns about the impacts of mining on source water quality and to ask the ASMC to declare the area unsuitable for mining.

John Kinney, Enforcement Coordinator for Black Warrior Riverkeeper notes, “We have appealed the ASMC’s ruling because they misinterpreted the available data which demonstrates the clear relationship between surface mining and the degradation of downstream water quality.”

Riverkeeper Nelson Brooke added, “This stretch of river deserves full protection as a vital source of water. The state should not be allowing companies to discharge pollution from coal mines into the daily source of water for 200,000 greater Birmingham-area drinking water consumers.”

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Black Warrior Riverkeeper’s mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. We are a citizen-based nonprofit organization advocating for clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities throughout the Black Warrior River watershed. To learn more visit BlackWarriorRiver.org