

News Release

For Immediate Release: August 8, 2017

**Municipal sewage sludge threatens residents in rural eastern Washington.
“Protect Mill Canyon Watershed” formed by Lincoln County neighbors to fend off pollution.**

Contact:

Morton Alexander mortonalexander@sisna.com
(509) 624-6855 or (509) 725-6638

Chrys Ostrander farmrchrys@gmail.com
(914) 246-0309 voice or text

Threatened by proposals to spread municipal sewage sludge on nearby agricultural land, today local residents and farmers living in Mill Canyon, 35 miles west of Spokane, WA, announced the creation of “Protect Mill Canyon Watershed,” a citizens’ committee to protect the area’s water resources and ecology.

“The science community is very divided on the safety of this practice,” said canyon resident and landowner Morton Alexander. “Unfortunately, the state Department of Ecology sees little controversy and only thinly regulates it. We can’t just sit by and do nothing as sewage from unknown sources is trucked in and dumped on our rural community.”

For over a year, residents of Mill Canyon in Lincoln County, Washington have been organizing resistance to the plans of neighboring Rosman Farms to apply municipal sewage sludge to its grain fields bordering the canyon. Also called “bio-solids,” sewage sludge is known to contain toxic contaminants.

Rosman Farms has applied to the Washington State Department of Ecology for a permit to apply sewage sludge to fields near Mill Canyon. The agency has yet to issue the permit. Meanwhile, local citizens are alarmed and are organizing to stop the permit and prevent “bio-solids” application which threatens their drinking and irrigation water supply and could end up in their air from blowing dust.

Mill Creek, a tributary to the Spokane River, runs through the canyon. Consequently, the Spokane River could also be contaminated if “bio-solids” are applied to the grain fields there.

Mill Canyon is home to residents who tend both commercial and amateur organic farms and gardens, some of which have been tended organically for over 50 years. Tolstoy Farm, one of the oldest secular intentional communities in the US, is located in Mill Canyon.

[Tolstoy Farms](#), one of the oldest and most well-known organic farms in the region that supplies produce to hundreds of customers, is also in Mill Canyon. The farm operates a market garden that has been certified organic for nearly 20 years. Tolstoy Farms helped create the [Spokane Farmer’s Market](#) and was at the forefront of introducing fresh, local, organic produce to Spokane. Although the irrigation source for Tolstoy Farms is not downstream from Rosman Farms’ fields, there is much concern for the possible effect to their neighbors’ land and drinking water, as well as the unpredictability of drift through air and seasonal flooding.

“No farm exists in a bubble,” noted organic farmer Timothy Pellow, “The National Organic Program regulations state that as an organic farmer, you are responsible for all materials applied to your fields, even when you do not apply those materials yourself. Thus, the threat of windborne or waterborne contaminants. Our commitment to healthy organic land stewardship is what draws our customers to us, what makes our business thrive. Our hundreds of families in the Spokane area and dozens in the

Davenport area who consume our produce do so for the security this knowledge provides. It is important to them, and personally important to us, that our soils and food not be contaminated by us, or as much as we have control over it, by the actions of others.”

Much of Rosman Farm’s land, perched above the canyon and its waterways, is classified by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service as Highly Erodible Land (HEL). This has led some soil scientists to warn that it is the worst place to experiment with “bio-solids” as a soil amendment. “Bio-solids” contain both known and unknown toxic contaminants—some are unknown because they are not tested for, and “bio-solids” may contain anything that has been disposed of in municipal sewage and waste water.

With support from the Sierra Club, the Columbia Institute for Water Policy and the Northwest Fund for the Environment, Mill Canyon neighbors are preparing to appeal in case the Department of Ecology approves the permit. They have launched a website, “Protectmillcanyon.org,” to inform the public and gain allies in their struggle. The website links to much information about the dangers of “bio-solids” and similar efforts to combat “bio-solids” throughout the United States. If the permit is ultimately denied, it will set a precedent for protecting the health and well-being of rural residents in many other communities.

Additional quotes:

Carla Martinez, owner of Perianth Herbs: “I have been wildcrafting [collecting wild plants] for the last eleven years for additions to my teas, oils and salves. I chose to start my business and grow and collect my herbs in this part of Mill Canyon because of the purity of a place that has never directly been touched by pesticides, growth hormones or other toxic chemicals. If my product ends up getting contaminated by toxins, it will put me out of business. I will not be able to promote my products for health benefits, if they could in fact cause adverse effects.”

Stash Jackowski: “I have lived at Tolstoy Farm since 1965. We don’t want sewage sludge anywhere near us. It cannot be proven safe. There is always the possibility that the sludge was not tested properly before being applied. Of all the places to put sludge, next to a canyon is one of the worst. That sludge is very likely to leave the Highly Erodible Land through water or the wind. The wind comes from that direction, depositing potential sludge on our planting area or on an area that water may bring to the planting area later. We get terrible floods sometimes that brings soil from [above the canyon]. See the [video](#) of our flood in the spring of 2014. We have been growing delicious and healthy organic vegetables for over 30 years. We have worked hard to improve the soil and keep it free of contamination. Please do not put our organic business or our health at risk!”

Links:

[Protect Mill Canyon Watershed](#)

###