

On October 20, 2009, in Sandersville, Georgia, more than 300 citizens from across the state attended the one and only official Environmental Protection Division (EPD) public hearing on hazardous pollutants from the \$2 billion Plant Washington coal plant, proposed for Washington County, in middle Georgia.

Sixty-five Georgians stepped up to the microphone to present their comments. Of these, 51 people, or 78 percent of those who spoke during more than three hours of testimony, said they were opposed to the coal plant and called upon the EPD not to go forward with the coal-fired plant. Many more hearing attendees submitted their comments in writing only.

The EPD has also received comments delivered in person, by email, or by mail from thousands of citizens from across the state. Among these: 750 cards in opposition to Plant Washington from college students across the state organized by Georgia Students for Sustainability and 462 emails from concerned people taking action through Georgia Environmental Action Network.

Here is a selection of the comments presented at the hearing on October 20 in Sandersville:

“My biggest objection to Plant Washington is that it is completely unnecessary. Money wasted on this plant could be invested in creating jobs in renewable energy sources and conservation.

“As a taxpayer and EMC customer in Washington County, I am concerned about higher taxes and higher electric rates if this plant is built. ... Electric rates will certainly go up, either to pay for the plant or to pay for its failure when regulation makes coal unprofitable.”

— **John Swint**, *retired social worker and third-generation Washington County native who lives in Warthen, just north of Sandersville*

“We own a family farm property, located about 5 miles from the proposed site of the coal plant. This hundred acres has been in my husband’s family for nearly 60 years, producing crops and livestock for much of that time. Many of the locals will remember my father-in-law, Roy Bonnell, Sr., and his grocery store in town. In fact, more than a few probably worked there or bought groceries from Mr. Bonnell’s store. Much of that produce came from our farm. ... This coal plant, if approved, will be the death of our dreams.”

— **Karen Bonnell**, *singer and recording artist, Sandersville*

“The health of the next generation is NOT FOR SALE. Put forward and accept other projects.”

— **Jamie McKenzie**, *a University of Georgia senior from Bartow County who is majoring in ecology*

“I just want air to breathe. I have a lung disease. My water is mine and not anyone else’s to take. Taking more water doesn’t make sense.”

— **Rachel Summerlin**, *resident of Warthen, Washington County*

“I’m not opposed to a power plant. I’m opposed to a *coal* plant. We have alternatives...Let’s put Georgians to work through sustainables and renewables... Coal has too many detrimental effects.”

— **Rep. Dubose Porter**, *State Representative (D-Dublin) and gubernatorial candidate*

“As a teacher in this county for 15 years, I was shocked at the number of children with asthma, ear problems and respiratory infections. Dirty coal will only make it worse. If, or I should say when this coal-fired plant causes our air to be out of attainment, we will not be able to attract any new business that would employ a much larger number of people. Coal-burning plants are financially risky and utility bills *will* go up to pay for this plant, as well as property taxes.

“What brought me to this county are its beauty, abundant wild life, and slower pace of life. Before we all give up something that is rare for a few jobs and power we don’t need, we had better think twice.”

—**Patricia A. Daniel**, *Warthen (taught 15 years at Sandersville Elementary School)*

“Coal plants are dinosaurs. Let’s move into the 21st Century. We must put a greater value on the quality of our air, water, our children and their future.

— **Larry Warthen**, *lifetime resident of Washington County who lives in Warthen, very close to Sandersville*

“Clean energy is more affordable, increasingly available and can provide the exact same output without the strenuous demands on our depleting resources nor the environmental pressures on our collective health.

“What is the future in Georgia? Is Georgia even thinking about the future? [Plant Washington] doesn’t make sense in the 21st Century.”

— **Branden Macie**, *student, Kennesaw State University, Cobb County*

“My son is a youth member of the National Bass Federation. It is unacceptable to me to have to tell him that he can only eat 5 ounces of his fish this month.”

— **Dianna Wedincamp**, *Twin City, Emanuel County. (Wedincamp herself has three times the amount of mercury in her body that EPA recommends because she eats fish that her son catches from local blackwater rivers. Wedincamp also works for the Ogeechee Riverkeeper organization).*

“I oppose the construction of Plant Washington because I’m a Snapping Shoals customer [an EMC signed on to help finance Plant Washington] and in our current global, environmental, financial and regulatory situation, the business argument for construction does not hold up. ...Plant Washington must not be built.”

— **Albert “Ab” J. Roesel, Jr.**, *retired high school math teacher in Conyers (Rockdale County)*

“Green energy is the future and coal is NOT.”

— **Michael Black**, *Oconee County, art student at UGA*

“Our hope and plans were to build a cabin on our pond, enjoy fishing and the wildlife in the woodlands and wetlands for years to come. Now, with the proposed coal plant, those

dreams are shattered. My oldest son, who is a doctor, knows the health risks a coal plant poses. My 16-year-old grandson has asthma and when I taught school at Sandersville Elementary I had students with asthma and met many parents and grandparents with respiratory problems. According to the pollution permit application filed by Power4Georgians, 678 tons of soot-forming particles will be released into the air annually; 40 percent of those are fine soot particles that the EPA says, because of microscopic size (less than one-seventh of the width of an average human hair) can lodge deeply into the lungs, causing serious respiratory ailments.

“My youngest son, now an attorney in Atlanta, says that by March of 2010 the EPA will impose regulations that will cause coal plants to be the most expensive form of energy to produce in this country. That is why four EMCs have pulled out of Power4Georgians.

“Power4Georgians should be renamed Pollution4Georgians and Poverty4Georgians living in Washington County. The taxpayers of Washington County will be left holding the bag for a \$2 billion-plus eyesore coal plant. Smart, renewable energy generates four to six times more jobs than fossil fuel production and doesn’t harm the environment.”

— **Elaine Weathers**, *Milledgeville, whose “dream property” is within 3 miles of proposed Plant Washington coal-burning plant*

“I am very concerned. It’s such a danger to our environment. It will cause irreparable damage. We have *got* to be good stewards of the land. God expects no less.”

— **Patti Long**, *retired home builder on a 28-acre farm in Harrison, near Sandersville*

“I’m a student at Georgia Tech and I’m a scientist and I want to say that you don’t have to be a scientist to know what’s in your water. Renewable energies mean jobs. Think about the children who will grow up here. Renewable energies are the way to go.

— **Keaton Belli**, *of Acworth (Cobb County), environmental science major in his senior year at Georgia Tech*

“This country is in bad shape. Coal is going to produce waste and is bad for the environment. I understand the job situation. Slavery was a job but you never got paid. We need to spread money around and this isn’t a good way to do it.”

— **Grant E. Cooper**, *Tennille, fifth-generation resident of Washington County*

“I am an avid angler and am very concerned about the detrimental effects the pollution from this plant will have on our ponds, streams and rivers. Not only will it cause fish in many rivers to be unsafe to eat, but all wildlife that drink from these waters will be impacted. I have fished the Oconee River many times and hoped I would be able to fish with my boys for years to come. If this coal plant is built, we will never build in Washington County.

“In closing: A safe coal plant is like a safe cigarette. There is no such thing.”

— **Stephen Bowers**, *retired state employee, Milledgeville; resident of nearby Baldwin County since 1968*

“On behalf of our several dozen local members, 10,000 members in Georgia and 650,000 members in the U.S., the Sierra Club strongly opposes this dirty coal plant. The Georgia EPD is not set up to protect your health or the environment, it exists to issue permits to

pollute . . . If you want to know who is going to protect you, you might as well look in the mirror.

“Dying is not a good way to make a living. . . Don't let your community be crucified on a cross of dirty coal.”

— **Mark Woodall**, *Chairman of the Sierra Club's Georgia Chapter*

“Why do we want to go back to the horse-and-buggy days? My four grandchildren come to enjoy my land and its wildlife. Do you know why Plant Washington needs to come here? Because they couldn't do this in places such as Atlanta and Conyers. This will totally destroy me if this coal-fired plant comes to Washington County.”

— **Jerry Leonard**, *who owns 2,000 acres in Washington County, including an 820-acre parcel adjacent to the power plant site*

“We need not wonder about the ill environmental and health effects of a new coal plant: The impacts already felt from Georgia's existing plants are here. They're a reality.

“I oppose the coal fired power plant because it's wrong to force an area to choose between jobs and the health of its community and children. To tell you the truth, there doesn't need to be a choice at all. The technology is here to provide green jobs through retrofitting and sustainable energy such as solar, wind, and responsible biomass.

“As a young person, when I picture the future of Georgia — *my* future — I see a revived and diversified economy based both on innovation and stewardship. I see Georgia as a national leader and a place where I can not only get a job, but also raise a family. “

— **Maura Friedman**, *student at University of Georgia and a member of GA YES (Georgia Youth for Energy Solutions)*

“This is my second hearing, and then as now I have the overwhelming impression that these permit hearings are largely window dressings for what is essentially a done deal: a deal between the so-called Environmental Protection Division and the polluter. I say "so-called" because it seems that a more appropriate name, if you want to keep the three letters of the acronym [EPD] is "Enabler of Pollution Division.””

— **Hartmut Ramm**, *Kennesaw (Cobb County); Young Harris College emeritus professor of physics and physical geography*

“The Ogeechee River is so contaminated already. Less than 20 pounds of mercury in the air per year make fish too toxic to eat. Plant Washington will be allowed to emit 105 pounds of mercury every year. We believe that's a violation of the Clean Water Act and shouldn't be allowed.”

— **Chandra Brown**, *Ogeechee-Canoochee Riverkeeper, Statesboro (Bulloch County)*

“I've been a fan of Snapping Shoals [one of the EMCs still on board to finance Plant Washington] . . . but recent directions and financial reasoning have given me pause. Is this power plant REALLY needed? If so, is this REALLY the most economically feasible way to go?

“Mostly, I'm concerned about the coal plant's effects on water quality and quantity. I'm a fish biologist by vocation and can assure you — if you have doubts — that there are good reasons to be concerned about both in the state of Georgia and in Washington

County.”

Assuming that no additional pollutants enter your streams from the development and operation of this plant, there are plenty of streams in this area that have impaired fish communities, and the problems in those streams have yet to be corrected.

Water for this plant is to be withdrawn from one river basin and discharged after use into a different river basin. As a fish biologist and angler, interbasin transfers can make me nervous.

“Finally, I’m concerned about the wells that will be drilled to back up the withdrawal of river water. They are going to be needed, and that is going to have some effect on the water that is available in other parts of the aquifer.

Please reconsider permitting.”

— **Patti Lanford**, *native Georgian and fish biologist, Covington (Newton County)*

“I am a concerned Georgia resident. I am worried because this plant would emit air and water pollution and contribute to global warming. I will have to deal with global warming in my lifetime. That makes Plant Washington my business. This plant would root us in decades more of fossil fuels. It would harm our health, degrade our environment, zap our economy. This plant is selling our state and its residents short.

Solar and wind investment creates at least three times more jobs per dollar than the same investment in coal.

“We can and should join the rest of the country in re-powering America with clean and efficient energy.”

— **Emily Thomas**, *Atlanta, Energy Associate, Environment Georgia*

“I live close enough for [Plant Washington] to destroy what my husband and I have worked to protect for 30 years and what his father and grandfather cared for and protected for nearly a hundred years. This plant is a direct threat to my home, my family, my property, my food sources, and my way of life. ...

“With the plant proposing to use millions of gallons of water per day, I do have concerns about our well on which we’ve depended for over 30 years.”

— **Paula Swint**, *retired educator, and 30-year resident of Washington County*