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Illinois Citizens for Clean Air & Water Petition U.S. EPA *ICCAW asks feds to revoke Illinois' poorly managed water pollution permit program*

Illinois Citizens for Clean Air and Water (ICCAW)¹ and the Washington, D.C. based Environmental Integrity Project (EIP)² have filed a formal legal petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that requests they take back control of the Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) permitting program from the Illinois EPA (IEPA). Revoking control from the IEPA, which has a lax record of issuing and enforcing these permits, will help protect Illinois residents from pollutants stemming from large industrialized livestock operations.

The U.S. Congress created the CWA to protect America's waters. The EPA was instructed to oversee the provisions of this Act. Since the leading source of pollutants found in U.S. streams and rivers comes from agriculture, including large industrialized livestock facilities known as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), these facilities are required to obtain CWA permits. These permits allow the EPA to regularly inspect and monitor water conditions around CAFOs to ensure their waste products don't contaminate streams.

To facilitate better management, the EPA transferred the CWA permitting program to each state's EPA. However, since the IEPA began managing the program 30+ years ago it has only issued about 40 CAFO permits, all of which are now expired. This is in spite of the fact that Illinois has one of the highest concentrations of CAFOs in the country and the Illinois Department of Agriculture has approved the construction of hundreds of new CAFOs over the last decade.

The IEPA's disregard of the CWA has encouraged corporations to move their polluting facilities from more highly regulated states, such as California, into Illinois. The latest application is for a 13,000-animal unit mega dairy in Jo Daviess County. The proposed CAFO is almost three times larger than the largest dairy in Illinois. Facilities of this size create enough untreated waste to blanket miles of farmland with manure, bacteria, industrial chemicals, and other contaminants. These pollutants wash into streams and rivers, kill fish, contaminate wells, and endanger the health and safety of Illinois residents.

Jo Daviess County resident Bern Colleran said, "We've been told by the Illinois Department of Agriculture that the IEPA will make sure this proposed factory farm doesn't pollute, yet they don't enforce the provisions of the CWA at any of the other CAFOs in Illinois. Why should we trust our pristine rivers and clean wells to an agency with such an abysmal record?"

The ICCAW and EIP are awaiting a response from the EPA regarding the revocation of the IEPA's permit program.

¹ ICCAW is a statewide coalition of individuals and community groups concerned with the environmental, human health, and quality of life impacts of large-scale, industrialized livestock production facilities. The organization has over 70 members from various counties throughout the State. The majority of its members are family farmers and rural residents that live near large-scale livestock facilities and have been adversely impacted by the problems they create.

² EIP (<http://www.environmentalintegrity.org>) is a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization established in March 2002 to advocate for more effective enforcement of environmental laws. EIP was founded by Eric Schaeffer, who was the director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Regulatory Enforcement. He resigned in 2002 after publicly expressing his frustration with efforts of the Bush Administration to weaken enforcement of the Clean Air Act and other laws.