



### **Three Grandmothers Join Forces to Appeal ADEQ Permit**

Three Arkansas women banded together to appeal a recent decision that would allow EC Farms to spray hog waste from C&H Hog Farms, Inc., onto additional karst terrain within the Buffalo National River watershed, an area known for the most caves and karst features within the state.

All three women independently attended a public comment hearing held in Jasper last March and objected to the modification of a permit exposing more tributaries (streams), springs and groundwater (wells, aquifers, etc) to untreated swine waste in a sensitive ecosystem that is already showing signs of stress. The comments they made at that time gave them standing to appeal the decision made by ADEQ. Of the 66 comments online or during the hearing, 53 were against the modification.

The three grandmothers have hired Richard Mays Law Firm, PLLC to guide them through the process. "None of us have done anything like this before, but we met up afterwards and discovered that we share a common determination to fight for the Buffalo. Someone had to take a stand for the river and it seemed to each of us that it was our turn," Carol Bitting explained.

Bitting lives on a tributary to the Buffalo National River in Newton County. For years she has volunteered her services by contributing to field studies and documentation of karst features within the Buffalo River watershed in Arkansas and other states. She's a member of the National Speleological Society and the Association for Arkansas Cave Studies. She loves horses, hiking, paddling the river and giving her family the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors as she has had.

Dr. Nancy Haller also has a long history of public service. She is a medical doctor who formerly served as Public Health Officer for the Newton County Health Department. In the 1990's she spearheaded the effort to establish the county as an eco-tourism destination securing numerous grants that have helped improve the quality of life for the residents of Newton County. Her concern for the Buffalo River stems from her understanding of the pathogens, bacteria, viruses and other substances known to leach into waterways and threaten human health in areas where confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) dispose of waste by spreading it on the ground. "It already happened once, when too much chicken litter ruined the wells around Mount Judea. That's when they had to pipe in water from the lake," Haller points out. "This permit allows in excess of 6.5 million gallons of untreated waste to be sprayed on fields and pastures south and west of Mount Judea. That's crazy!"

Lin Wellford, a resident of Carroll County, is an active member of one of the state's first watershed partnership groups and has been involved in preserving and protecting Ozark waterways for more than a decade. An avid kayaker who frequently floats the Buffalo, she worries that spraying waste on additional fields within the river's watershed will skew the results of the Big Creek Research and Extension Team's taxpayer funded monitoring efforts on a major tributary to the Buffalo River. The new fields drain into different tributaries that are not currently being monitored. "People have started to question whether BCRET's mission was compromised by the fact that the director of the team is so closely associated with the U of A School of Agriculture. Originally the study was supposed to focus on monitoring the Buffalo National River to ensure it was not impacted, but once it began, the title was quickly changed to Demonstrating and Monitoring the Sustainable Nutrients On C&H Hog Farm in Big Creek Watershed".

According to the EPA, non-point source pollution associated with agricultural practices, mostly stemming from the rapid evolution of indoor feedlots known as CAFOs, is now the leading cause of impaired waterways within the US.

These grandmothers agree that agriculture is important to the state, and they support the rights of independent farmers to make a living on their land. They think that the corporate take-over of farming is turning farms into factories and transforming farmers into non-independent contract operators who have little say in decision-making. "We keep hearing how industrial-scale agricultural is the only way to feed a hungry world, but CAFOs have been shown to be hugely damaging to the environment. How long can we feed the world if we wreck our land and water resources in the process?" Wellford asked.

"And if it turns out that we can't protect a river that has been set aside as a national park, is any waterway in this country safe?" Dr, Haller added.

The hearing on this matter has been set for Dec. 5-6 at the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology building in North Little Rock.