

When SCE&G made application for a 1,700 acre coal ash landfill special exception in a pastoral area of Colleton County, they got political support, but they forgot to get the people's support.

Neighbors of the proposed landfill site learned about their plans when surveyors were cutting lines next to their property. Soon word trickled out to the community, County and Lowcountry that something was brewing. Like the recent democracy movements in Egypt and other countries, the social media; e mail, Facebook, Twitter and even Google Earth got information flowing. People were quickly educated on the dangers of coal ash to health and the environment. They learned of past environmental transgressions by utility companies and in particular SCE&G's application to build a coal ash landfill, and the County's flawed report on SCE&G's application. A study by James G. Goodwin, Jr., PhD, Professor and Past Chairman, Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, Clemson University not only showed the severe toxicity of coal ash, but concluded that if only 160 acres of the site were used as landfill at a height of 100 feet, there would be **21,713,789 tons** of toxic material in Colleton County. The report further included that *"First, even the best liner and leachate collection system will ultimately fail due to natural deterioration..."* (US EPA Federal Register, August 30, 1988, Vol.53, No168). Even SCE&G admitted that the manufacturer of their proposed liner would only warrant the life of the liner for 30 years. The report further stated that *"ounce for ounce, coal ash released from a power plant delivers more radiation than nuclear waste shielded via water or dry cask storage"* (Myra Hvistendahl, Scientific American, December 13, 2007). When asked by the Coastal Conservation League to consider placing a conservation easement on the remaining acreage, SCE&G said "no" because they were discussing that a portion of the land might be used for a natural gas plant.

A recent study by Clemson University's Strom Thurmond Institute shows that sprawling development actually cost communities; roads, water, sewer, fire and police protection, and schools. Costs that can drive up taxes. On the other hand eco-tourism dollars require little public services, and bring dollars to the community that benefit local businesses. It is a net win for everyone, including our quality of life. Not to be outdone, the University of South Carolina published a study, *The Underappreciated Assets; The Economic Impact of South Carolina's Natural Resources* that showed that this fast growing sector of our economy supported \$29.1 billion in total impact, including 235,431 jobs and \$7.8 billion in labor income. The more pristine the area, the more attractive it is to those that visit and live there.

Colleton County reaps substantial economic benefits from its natural resources. We and our guests are the largest beneficiaries of the ACE Basin's 350,000 acres of protected land. Land that includes the Donnelly Wildlife Management Area's 8,000 acres of extraordinary hunting, birding and nature viewing. Our borders are anchored by the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge; the Grove unit on the Edisto River, and the Combahee unit on Bonny Hall Plantation, totaling 12,000 acres of public access land. Botany Bay Plantation bordering Colleton County's Edisto Beach, also provides public access, recreational hunting and nature experiences.. Since opening in 2009, with no advertisement, Botany Bay alone has hosted over 100,000 visitors from every state and many countries. These properties that protect unique habitat have attracted millions of dollars of eco-tourism that benefits our area. Visitors to the ACE Basin stay in our hotels, eat at our restaurants, hire our guides, and buy our supplies creating jobs and revenue for Colleton County. They require little public services, and leave a clean wake behind them.

The recently adopted Colleton County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and the corresponding Zoning Ordinance was the result of exhaustive public hearings and surveys that showed that the overwhelming concerns of the citizens were to protect our natural resources and to preserve the rural nature outside of urban areas. In fact, the Zoning Ordinance states that the purpose of the Ordinance is:

- **Promoting health, safety**, and general welfare of the community;
- **Lessening congestion** in the streets,
- Securing safety from fire,
- Providing adequate light and air;
- Providing for adequate transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks, and other public improvements;
- Protecting **scenic and unique areas**, in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan;

Is it no surprise that the application to make the headwaters of the Ashepoo River the site of over 21 million tons of toxic waste was so overwhelmingly opposed? Maybe the real surprise was how Colleton County citizens have solidified to protect what is so dear to them. The power balance in Colleton County has shifted from a few that make decisions behind closed doors to the people who elect them. It will be interesting to see what the next series of elections will produce.

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