



# Athens Conservancy

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CC: Ms. Susan Hedman, Regional Administrator, USEPA Region 5 [hedman.susan@epa.gov](mailto:hedman.susan@epa.gov),  
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State Rep. Debbie Phillips [Rep94@ohiohouse.gov](mailto:Rep94@ohiohouse.gov),  
Athens County Commissioner Lenny Eliason [leliason@athensoh.org](mailto:leliason@athensoh.org)

## **Re: Permit Application APATT026224**

December 30, 2014

Dear Director Zehringer and Chief Simmers,

On behalf of the board of directors of the Athens Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) land trust, I am writing in regard to the permit application APATT026224 for a third injection well near the town of Torch in Athens County. We are greatly concerned about this proposed well, which would be located close to a nature preserve we own and a recreational trail we are developing. We think that this well poses a risk to the environment in our nature preserve and a health and safety risk to people using our recreational trail.

Map 1 (attached) shows the positions of Athens Conservancy properties relative to the current K&H wells. Map 2 shows the position of the proposed new well and the surface facility where fluid will be delivered. The Athens-Belpre Rail-Trail (ABRT) passes less than a half-mile north of the K&H wells. It is currently owned by the Athens Conservancy and is being developed as a recreational trail, with eventual plans to deed it to the County. This portion of the ABRT was purchased in 2010 with a Clean Ohio grant. Several miles of the ABRT closely parallel Skunk Run, which the trail crosses five times. The Athens Conservancy also owns the 28-acre Skunk Run Nature Preserve, purchased in 2013 with a Clean Ohio grant, adjacent to the rail grade about 1.5 miles northwest of, and downstream from, the K&H wells.

The K&H property drains into Skunk Run and White's Run. Although the new well lies in the White's Run watershed, fluid to be injected into that well will initially be unloaded into storage tanks in the K&H surface facility (shown on attached maps), which lies in the Skunk Run watershed; the fluid will be piped from there to the new well. Any spills from the unloading and piping of fluid to the K&H #3 well would present a contamination risk for Skunk Run. The toxins in this waste, which we understand often include known carcinogens such as toluene and benzene as well as radioactivity, would present a threat to aquatic life in Skunk Run and the ecological integrity of the Skunk Run Preserve. Furthermore, air pollution from such a spill, as well as from the 24-hour-a-day venting from the storage tanks, may present a health hazard for people using the recreational trail. We understand that ODNR does not monitor the air around

injection wells, so trail users and nearby residents will not know what toxins they are being exposed to.

Although there are already two injection wells on the site, the maximum amount of waste injected per day in the third well according to the permit application will be more than twice as great as the two existing wells combined. The risk of a spill can be expected to increase with the number of vehicles delivering the material and the amount of waste delivered.

Spills are not a hypothetical concern. A spill from one of the other K&H wells occurred in January 2014, contaminating a nearby creek. The testing done by ODNR after the spill was very limited. Its analysis of water samples tested only for parameters that are traditionally used to evaluate water esthetics. ODNR's analysis did not evaluate the toxicity of the contaminants present in the water samples, so their study was of little use for evaluating public health risks or dangers to aquatic life.

Because of our concerns about the existing and proposed K&H wells, we have commissioned regular sampling and analysis of Skunk Run water by a professional in order to establish a baseline record of water quality in the stream; that study began last spring, and three samples have been analyzed to date. We are planning to supplement this with a baseline study of fish and other aquatic life in the Skunk Run Preserve.

Injection wells have also caused earthquakes in Ohio and elsewhere. There is nothing in the application materials addressing the safety of injecting such large volumes of liquid in relation to possible inducement of seismic activity. A magnitude 5.7 earthquake in Oklahoma, which destroyed 14 houses and was felt 800 miles away, has been linked to injection of fracking wastewater (<http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/3072#.UVL1DqJPNPI>). From the same article: "Scientists have linked a rising number of quakes in normally calm parts of Arkansas, Texas, Ohio and Colorado to below-ground injection. In the last four years, the number of quakes in the middle of the United States jumped 11-fold from the three decades prior". Even small earthquakes could damage and weaken bridges and stone culverts along the rail-trail, threatening the safety of trail-users.

In consideration of these issues, we strongly oppose the delivery of up to 12,000 additional barrels of toxic waste per day, much of it from out of state, to storage tanks in the Skunk Run watershed. Beyond our concern about the Athens Conservancy's properties and the people who use them, this new well also presents a health risk for the residents of the town of Torch, located about 0.5 mile north of the well site. Any air pollution resulting from a spill, as well as from increased venting from the storage tanks servicing a third well, would likely be borne into Torch by south winds.

Ohio law requires that the Chief grant a public hearing if any comments are substantive and relevant to health, safety, or good conservation practices (Ohio Administrative Code 1501:9-3-06 (H) (2) (c)). We therefore ask that there be a public hearing in Athens County to document and respond to public health, safety and conservation concerns regarding this new well.

Sincerely,

Robert Scott Placier  
President