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Our Struggles with the Environmental Injustice of Longwall Coal Mining

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I want to thank the Citizens Coal Council for its undaunted work to correct the plight of coalfield communities by focusing on the survival of our farmland and water resources.

Our struggle with longwall mining began in 2005, about a year after my husband and I moved to a lovely home on Lake Lou Yaeger in Litchfield, Illinois, in rural Montgomery County. Our happiness with our new home was jolted when the City of Litchfield agreed to sell water from Lake Yaeger to a proposed longwall mine 10 miles away in Hillsboro during a drought with already low lake levels.

Farmers and residents in the county were also frustrated with the impending damage to their health, land, and water. Citizens Against Longwall Mining (CALM), a non-profit hoping to protect farmland and water resources, was established. Citizens Coal Council (CCC) entered the scene with the “how and who to contact” on mining problems and stayed with us through the many battles.

In 2006, Chris Cline Group (CCG) initiated longwall coal mining in the Illinois Coal Basin, supported by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA). The highly mechanized process was touted as an advancement since the “planned subsidence” was immediate and would be fixed in a timely fashion. Instead, the failed promises of longwall mining are the realities of continued land and water destruction.

The Montgomery County Board (MCB) sold 120,000 acres of coal rights to a Chris Cline Group affiliate for tax debt repayment, denying landowners the chance to reclaim their rights. This injustice affected vulnerable residents without coal and subsidence rights. With Hillsboro Energy LLC's unchecked authority to subside farmland, issues like drainage, erosion, and flooded nonfarmable land were ignored by the IDNR.

The initial clash with IDNR involved a 4-year Administrative Review of a permit, marked by threats of sanctions against petitioners and the unfair removal of our pro-bono lawyer. Despite the adversarial process, no alterations were made to the permit, Hillsboro Energy LLC's (HEL) operations, or financial obligations to landowners. The notion that residents in Illinois can effectively amend an invalid and hazardous permit proved unrealistic.

There is tremendous support from the State of Illinois to continue coal mining, but coal is the most destructive of all fossil fuels. Continued promotion of coal mining is in direct conflict with

Illinois' clean energy goals. Coal's toxicity and how it is mined clearly establishes that it should be eliminated. Farmland must be protected from mining and CO2 pipelines.

The coal industry is very powerful and has established its privileges in the permitting process. Knowing our rights and how we can fight the unfair coal mining system has been essential to CALM members. CCC has facilitated our learning through workshops, email alerts, Federal Register Mining Notices, a multi-state video conference with federal mining officials, and ongoing invaluable encouragement.

Over this period of coal mining privileges, CCC has been there with an unequivocal focus on what must be done for future generations. We have worked with several non-profits that tend to shy away from examining the flagrant problems with coal, coal mining, and coal use. CCC has realized that the current hardships to coal mining communities can and must be eliminated. The challenge is to get legislators, public officials, and conservationists on board for future land and water use. Marketing great ideas takes organizing, travel, research, and media work, which costs money.

May CCC's work continue to be funded and hopefully expanded to better help us all in the coalfield communities across the country.



Sincerely Yours,



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