

## Quebecois lawmaker up in arms over Vermont landfill expansion plan

By **Elizabeth Gribkoff**

Jul 17 2018 |



View of Lake Memphremagog from a hill near Mansonville, Eastern Townships, Quebec. Photo by Kevstan/Wikimedia Commons

**A** member of the Canadian Parliament issued a call to Vermont leaders to delay public meetings on the proposed 51-acre expansion to the Coventry landfill until studies are carried out to determine the potential impact on a key water source for those living north of the border.

Denis Paradis, member of parliament for Brome-Missisquoi, wrote in a letter July 16 saying that he has asked Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland and U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo to engage the International Joint Commission on the matter.

“I am calling on you to suspend the public consultation process until the IJC reaches a decision regarding water quality, as well as the current and potential impact of the landfill site in Coventry,” he wrote.

Paradis wants the bi-national IJC, which aids both countries on issues impacting boundary waters, to assess the environmental impact of the proposed 51-acre expansion on Lake Memphremagog, according to identical letters he sent to Gov. Phil Scott and Agency of Natural Resources Secretary Julie Moore.

Rebecca Kelley, the governor’s communications director, said Scott would review the letter with Moore to determine how to move forward.

Paradis said in an interview Tuesday that he requested the outside investigation because, per the terms of the International Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, the IJC is supposed to resolve any disputes related to shared waters.

New England Waste Services of Vermont Inc., a subsidiary of the waste management firm Casella, applied last March for a 10-year recertification of the 78-acre lined landfill, and for an expansion on the south side of the existing operation.

Under the [draft certification issued in June](#), the proposed landfill addition would not be finalized until after public comments are received by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.

Cathy Jamieson, head of the state's solid waste division, said that her department meets multiple times a year with a group of Quebec stakeholders to update them on the Coventry landfill, including the proposed expansion.

As part of its efforts to get approval for the expansion, Casella had to detail how it would minimize environmental hazards, such as groundwater contamination or noxious odors associated with landfills.

Casella plans to minimize the risk of landfill leachate — liquid contaminated with landfill pollutants — leaking into groundwater by double-lining the landfill cells and installing a collection system that stores the contaminated fluid in nearby tanks.

Paradis and some of his constituents are not convinced that these measures merit approval of the expansion. In his letter, Paradis wrote that the landfill was in a “controversial location” next to the Black River, which drains into Lake Memphremagog. The international body of water is located mostly in Canada and provides drinking water for almost 200,000 Quebec residents.

“There are a lot of places that you can put your garbage that are not next to a lake,” Paradis said Tuesday.



The Coventry landfill, operated by Casella Waste Systems. Chittenden Solid Waste District photo

A main concern from Paradis' constituents is that landfill leachate treated in Newport is not tested as rigorously as it would be in Canada. For example, Vermont does not require treatment plants to test for heavy metal residue as strictly as Canada does, Paradis said.

Robert Benoit, director of conservation group Memphremagog Conservation Inc, echoed Paradis' concerns about the leachate — which he referred to as “garbage juice.”

Because Lake Memphremagog is not a drinking water source for Vermont, the leachate is not treated sufficiently to meet Canadian standards for potable water, Benoit said in an interview Tuesday.

“The lake in Quebec is a drinking water lake, so the issue is much more serious,” he said.

Newport's wastewater plant treats up to 15,000 gallons of leachate a day, said Thomas Bernier, director of public works for the city.

The Newport plant sends treated water into the Clyde River, a tributary of Lake Memphremagog. Treating the leachate has not posed any problems for the wastewater treatment plant — in fact, managers have requested that the state allow Casella to send more leachate to Newport, he said. The request has so far been denied.

When asked whether treated leachate was drinkable, Bernier that he “wouldn't suggest drinking any of the effluent that leaves our wastewater plant.” He added that incoming leachate is diluted with other wastewater and that the outflow meets state water quality standards.

Jessica Bulova, head of Vermont's wastewater program, said that the treated water from the Newport plant has to comply with “surface water standards,” which are different than drinking water standards. Bulova added that this is typical for wastewater plants, noting that drinking water undergoes further purification before it gets to the tap.

Casella also has agreements in place to treat leachate at plants in Barre, Burlington, Essex and Montpelier.

At a [public meeting held in June](#), residents of Coventry and nearby towns expressed concerns that the proposed landfill expansion would further exacerbate noxious odors and declining property values in the area.

Danville resident Henry Coe said at the meeting that he had questioned the location of the Nadeau's dump — the precursor to the Casella operation — when he dumped trash there in the 1960s.

“It is an equally bad location now, perched as it is above an international potable water source for thousands of our Quebec neighbors, in Magog and Sherbrooke, whose population is three times the size of Burlington's,” he said. “Common sense says you don't place an outhouse above a potable spring.”

Benoit said that a Canadian dump near the lake had been closed decades ago because of environmental concerns, but said that Vermonters have been “very quiet” on its impact on their communities. He suspects this is because the Coventry landfill — the state's only open landfill — is located out of sight for most residents.

“Nobody wants this site in their municipality,” Benoit said. “It's a beautiful thing — garbage from the other towns all goes there, and the other mayors are very happy.”

Frank Bevacqua, a spokesperson for the International Joint Commission, said it is already investigating the effectiveness of Canadian and U.S. nutrient management programs in the Memphremagog watershed. The IJC is examining the Coventry landfill as a part of that, but not as a “major focus” of the study, he said.