



Director Mary Mertz
Ohio Department of Natural Resources
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Cc:
Eric Vendel, Chief
Division of Oil and Gas Resources Management

Dear Director Mertz,

The Division of Oil and Gas Resources Management (“DOGRM”) has issued draft permits for the Powhatan Salt Company/Mountaineer NGL Storage caverns without taking basic steps to protect public safety. We, the undersigned six groups, write this letter to urge you to instruct DOGRM to deny Powhatan Salt company’s applications.

To date, Powhatan Salt Company has not provided the information necessary for DOGRM to evaluate the public health and safety risks of the proposed wells. During the February 2021 public comment period, the general public, community groups, environmental groups, members of the impacted community, and technical experts submitted over 1,000 comments raising concerns on Powhatan Salt Company’s applications. It does not appear that DOGRM seriously considered the vast majority of these comments. As just one example, **when issuing the draft permits, DOGRM provided no response to 42 out of 58 comments submitted by technical experts PSE Healthy Energy on the deficiencies in Powhatan Salt Company’s applications.** A copy of this report is attached to this letter.

Critical concerns raised by commenters and apparently ignored by DOGRM include (1) lack of due diligence in reviewing site location; (2) the proposed wells will not meet minimum industry standards set by the American Petroleum Institute; (3) the applications lack information essential to determining well integrity. Each of these concerns are discussed below:

- (1) **There are serious risks associated with the wells’ location.** Locating and drilling these wells is the first step in the Powhatan Salt solution mining process and the Mountaineer NGL Storage cavern project. A bad location has serious consequences for every step of the project that comes next.

The location is unsuitable for these wells because it is:

- In a floodplain, at a time when floods are becoming more frequent;

- Only a couple hundred feet (or less) from the drinking water source of approximately 5 million people;
- One mile north of the drinking water wells for the City of Clarington whose aquifer is extremely susceptible to contamination;
- In an area of current and historic extreme subsurface and surface activity, including: multiple nearby horizontal wells (a lateral runs 1/4mile from one of the proposed Powhatan Salt wells); nearby coal mines, including one of unknown extents; multiple industrial water takes, at least one known mine shaft, and likely numerous other unknown migration pathways to the surface from past industrial activities

(2) **Powhatan Salt has not demonstrated that it is meeting basic industry standards, set by the American Petroleum Institute, for its solution mining wells.** These industry standards are based on decades of industry experience and are crafted with public safety in mind. Solution mining wells that do not meet basic industry standards jeopardize public health and safety. The attached report lists numerous grave examples of what happens when NGL storage is done without due diligence—it causes death, serious energy, and millions of dollars in property damage.

(3) **Powhatan Salt Company’s applications lack basic information that would be expected for any subsurface drilling or mining activity.** The attached report details how basic geological information and information related to underground sources of drinking water is missing from Powhatan Salt Company’s application. This is unacceptable and not in line with Ohio or Federal law.

The groups on this letter have still not been able to obtain from DOGRM copies of all concerns submitted during the February 2021 comment period, so there are likely additional concerns that we have not been able to see that DOGRM may or may not have considered.

A high-risk location and inadequate well construction has serious consequences for every subsequent step of the Powhatan Salt solution mining process and Mountaineer NGL Storage project. The points raised in the PSE Healthy Energy report show that basic due diligence has not been done on these wells—by Powhatan Salt or DOGRM.

We ask that you, in your capacity as Director of ODNR, instruct DOGRM to deny Powhatan Salt Company’s applications for their solution mining wells because they are incomplete and inadequate to protect public health and safety.

Thank you,

Ben Hunkler
Concerned Ohio River Residents

Teresa Mills
Buckeye Environmental Network

Leatra Harper
FreshWater Accountability Project

Athens County Future Action Network Steering Committee

Vivian Stockman
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition

Cheryl Johncox
Sierra Club