



Maine Water Environment Association

Protecting Maine's Water Resources

TO: Karen Knuuti, DEP Solid Waste Project Manager
Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

FROM: Maine Water Environment Association (MeWEA)

DATE: August 5, 2024

RE: Public Benefit Determination Application for Juniper Ridge Expansion

Maine's recent and extensive legislative changes to disposal of municipal wastewater biosolids (LD 1911) coupled with its changes to construction and demolition debris restrictions (LD 1639), has significantly impacted operations for dozens of clean water districts and municipalities across Maine. These changes, made before Maine had a long-term biosolids management plan, have left the State with waste management challenges that must be addressed. Outlined in Maine's Biosolids Study conducted by the DEP and Brown and Caldwell (2023), it is our understanding that there are only three to five years of remaining landfill capacity.¹

The public benefit determination application references several plans and studies that demonstrate need. In February 2023, the biosolids entering the landfill from municipalities statewide, coupled with the lack of bulky waste, was near crisis level. Facilities were left with no where to send their biosolids and no future plan to address the critical issues with landfill capacity. This meant that during daily operations, our utility leaders had to make impossible choices about how to run their facilities in ways they were not designed. MeWEA, the DEP, and our clean water facilities were scrambling to find ways to remove biosolids through any means - reaching out to other states, even having to look internationally. This is not sustainable.

Maine needs to develop and fund the infrastructure to support the policies that have been enacted. As part of the Biosolids Study referenced within the public benefit application materials, MeWEA partnered with the DEP & Brown and Caldwell to review how Maine can better manage its biosolids with a long-term plan. This study considers future reduction of volume by further reducing the amount of water in the wet waste heading to landfills, which many of our clean water facilities are working toward. However, this technology requires significant investment, design, construction, and operational considerations, which will take years. By moving forward with the expansion of this landfill, Maine is taking the first step to align its policies with its needs.

For these reasons, we strongly recommend that the public benefit determination is granted for the proposed expansion of the Juniper Ridge Landfill. MeWEA realizes the time required to review and make a decision on the public benefit determination so we strongly recommend the review process is not delayed.

¹ Brown and Caldwell, (December 15, 2023). Final Report: An Evaluation of Biosolids Management in Maine and Recommendations for the Future (prepared for the Maine Department of Environmental Protection). <https://www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/attach.php?id=12198306&an=1>