



Ohio Environmental Council

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Press Release

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OEC praises Strickland for overhauling coal bill

Lame duck gambit by coal lobbyists backfires; clean water laws maintained

COLUMBUS, OHIO – The Ohio Environmental Council is praising officials from Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland’s administration for standing up to coal industry lobbyists who attempted to roll back clean water protections for coal mining projects.

The Ohio House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee voted 21-0 this morning to overhaul the bill, removing provisions to weaken clean water protections. Instead, the committee approved a compromise agreed to by the Ohio EPA, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, environmental-conservation groups and the coal industry.

The full Ohio House of Representatives and Ohio Senate are expected to OK the re-write before the legislature wraps up the current two-year session, today or tomorrow.

“The coal lobbyists reached way too far this time. Their desperate attempt to force a radical rollback of clean water protections through the lame duck legislature hit a big green wall at the Statehouse,” said Jack Shaner, Deputy Director of the Ohio Environmental Council.

“We thank Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director Sean Logan and Ohio EPA Director Chris Korleski, who stood tall in this debate. Their four-square opposition along with the reluctance of Ohio House leaders to go along with Big Coal’s radical plan forced the industry to capitulate. The real winners are the people of Eastern and Southern Ohio and their water and wildlife resources. They will continue to enjoy legal protections for clean surface and ground water.”

As amended by the House committee, the bill also requires the two agencies to coordinate their respective efforts to review permit applications for permits involving coal mining and reclamation and places a 240-day timeline on ODNR review of mining permits.

As written by the coal lobby, the original bill proposed to transfer water permitting oversight for coal mining from the OEPA to the ODNR. It also threatened to roll back safeguards that protect small streams from being filled with coal waste and groundwater from contamination with toxics that may leach into the water when coal combustion “fly ash” is mixed with soil for reclamation projects.

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The Ohio Senate voted 22-9 last week to approve the original bill, over the objections of the ODNR, the OEPA and the Ohio Environmental Council.

"The coal lobbyists were like a Las Vegas gambler who dreamed of a big haul but won only chump change. Gone are the environmental rollbacks, the transfer of water permitting authority, the automatic permit approval, and the industry-cozy Reclamation Commission sitting in judgment of water permits. All that King Coal got was a glittery but hollow ornament," said Shaner.

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (www.theOEC.org) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is a network of more than 100 local and state environmental-conservation organizations.