

Commentary: Another landfill for hazardous waste from other states is not the way to generate economic development in Utah



(Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune) Small rock like structures formed by bacteria in the Great Salt Lake have become visible along the North shore of Antelope Island. Older structures dry up and collapse as the water recedes leaving dry domes. Known as microbialites, a few of the microbial mounds are being gathered and studied by researchers.

[By Lynn de Freitas and Lindsay Beebe | For The Tribune](#)

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What does it say about Utah when our neighboring states think of us as the place where they can dump their nastiest garbage? Makes you proud, doesn't it?

In a remote corner of Box Elder County, on the shores of Great Salt Lake, Promontory Point Resources, LLC, has [applied for a Class V waste permit](#) — a permit specifically designed to accept waste from out of state. But this isn't household garbage we're talking about here; this is

bad stuff. This is California hazardous waste, which that state defines as “waste with a chemical composition or other properties that make it capable of causing illness, death, or some other harm to humans and other life forms.” Interestingly, California hazardous waste magically becomes non-hazardous once it crosses the Utah border.

It’s also coal ash from throughout the West and Midwest. Coal ash — or, as Utah calls it, coal combustion residual, is the by-product of burning coal to generate electricity and, depending on where the coal is mined, can contain all sorts of dangerous toxicants. These include arsenic, lead, mercury, antimony, boron... You get the picture.

The landfill would also be able to accept special wastes and small quantity generator hazardous wastes, such as low-level infectious waste, heavy metals, solvents and a variety of organic compounds like PCBs.

Here’s a puzzle. Why on earth would Box Elder County and the state not only allow, but actually encourage, the construction of a Class V landfill on the shores of Great Salt Lake and risk destroying one of the state’s iconic resources? Why isn’t there a buffer zone around the lake that ensures the protection of the lake against clearly inappropriate development such as this? Given that there’s over 2,000 years worth of Class V storage already existing in the state — 2,000 years! – surely there’s no reason to permit this facility.

Some will argue that the landfill will be built to modern standards. That’s fine, but here’s the thing: Landfills that were built to “modern standards” in the 1960s and 1970s are considered inadequate by today’s standards. With a projected lifespan of 125 years, what are the odds that today’s standards will be considered inadequate 50 years from now? Being built to today’s standards is no guarantee that the facility will remain intact when the Big One hits, especially given that the Great Salt Lake Faultline runs right next to the landfill.

As for how the facility is run, the fact of the matter is that there’s simply no way that the state can guarantee that the landfill will be properly managed. There are five staff members that, in addition to other duties, have to inspect 20 facilities throughout the state. The working principle within the Utah Department of Environmental Quality is that many of these facilities consider getting fined when caught doing something illegal as simply the cost of doing business. In other words, it’s much cheaper to pay the fine than comply with the law.

It’s one thing to promote economic growth and development within Utah, but it’s quite another to risk the ecological health and well-being of Great Salt Lake, and the \$1.3 billion in revenue that the lake generates annually, so that a few individuals can make money by bringing in railcar loads of hazardous waste from other states that nobody else wants.

Yes, waste has to go somewhere – but not here. This is simply not a risk that we can take.

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