

Transcript of Wednesday morning March 5th, 2014 - Interview of Larry Ragonese, DEP spokesperson, by Jim Gearhart, Host of WKXW Radio 101.5 FM - 8-8:30am half hour following a hatchet job interview by Deborah Mans in the previous half hour

Jim Gerhardt: In the last half hour we talked with Debbie Mans (in the 730 – 8am half hour) who speaks for the organization New York New Jersey Baykeeper and talking about a plan the state has in motion right now to dump what is said to be huge amounts of material some of which is considered to be toxic in a flood plain which apparently is against the rules. So we talked with Debbie about that and now responding to that is Larry Ragonese. Larry speaks for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection - Larry good morning.

Larry Ragonese: Good morning Jim – how are you? Thanks for having me on here.

JG: Well it's my pleasure. I'm glad you called. Essentially what I think is going on and my information is based pretty much on Debbie and what Debbie said is also in this New York Times article that I'm sure you're aware of

LR: I'm aware and I wish the New York Times reporter had spent some time talking to us about **the facts.**

JG: So what it boils down to in a sense is that the DEP is politically motivated to waive the rules against dumping hazardous material in a flood plain. Is that not pretty much what the essence of their article?

LR: Well the essence of their article (is nonsense)... let me just tell you **the facts.**

JG: Uh... Ok.

LR: I don't want to give the essence of the article (any credibility)... OK, two things. Number one, you mentioned toxic, there's no toxic materials to be dumped there, no highly contaminated materials, what you have is a site along the Rahway River, a former American Cyanamid operation, that is leaking alum sludge into the River. A previous capping effort there about a decade ago has been failing. We found that there is contamination going into the river, the type of contamination that Debbie Mans and the Baykeeper **should not want** in the river. We immediately reached out to the responsible party, the owner of the property, to demand that action be taken to stem this flow. The property owner has responded properly, hired a licensed professional remediation expert and has put together a plan at their expense to stem this pollution and to properly cap the site. And that's really what we have going on here. We have been working with them for the past couple of years. They initially sent us a plan that the DEP did not want. In fact we were very critical of the plan that was sent to us – (*the plan that Debbie Mans endorsed to us in 2010 and 2011*) -that's actually correct. Debbie talks about DEP staff being appalled and aghast... well, we're not appalled and aghast, we professionally vetted this plan – the original plan that came to us (*Debbie's plan*) was very insufficient and we publicly in documents to them - that are public documents -were very critical. We made them go back and dramatically revamp that plan so that it could meet all environmental requirements in New Jersey. They have come back to us and we thoroughly looked at that plan – our scientists, our engineers, **basing our decisions on facts and science**, and we have recently approved a plan that can let them start work shortly on recreating the berms on this site to stem the pollution with the goal of capping it completely and then putting part of it into future redevelopment or some small commercial warehouses or storage or things of that nature. And as far as flooding is concerned Debbie Mans continues to say that flood waters will run across this site and wash contaminated materials into the watershed. **That's not true.** This has been properly

engineered. There's no possibility of that occurring. All Debbie has to do is go talk to some experts at DEP who know about flooding, talk to the army corps of engineers – they'll explain the flow of tides to her, but for some reason she says "I'm not paying attention to it". And she's scaring people – needlessly scaring people about this project.

JG: Yeah well again if you read the material as you mentioned the New York times (**which Debbie Mans wrote**), and there was a Star Ledger editorial about it (**which Debbie Mans wrote**), all sort of pointing in the same direction pretty much supporting what the baykeep people had said (**because the reporters took her word for it**).

LR: Jim, they keep saying that the DEP staff is opposed to this and appalled and aghast and **that's just not the case**. Our scientists were of course very critical – that's our job. When someone comes to us with a major project that has an environmental impact, our job is to tear it apart and our staff was not kind to this (initial) report – they were critical and so Debbie and the critics see the original documentation that was very critical and they say AHA! And they are opposed to it, but they're not looking at **step two** that this property owner (**now with an experienced contractor and LSRP**) had to spend an enormous amount of time and money to come back to us with something that met our requirements.

JG: But it's certainly worth it they stand to profit mightily from it, do they not? Because they're the ones doing the uhh the material the uhhh what is it the tipping fees....

LR: Well whoever it would be, the responsible party – the way it works is this – you own the property, you must remediate it and you come to us with a plan. As long as that plan meets our environmental requirements, here at the DEP we're looking at the environmental issues. If Debbie and others want to get into issues of political intrigue that's up to them and others, but here at DEP the only thing we're looking at is the environmental portion of it.

JG: ***So you're saying categorically pretty much that there's no political – economic story in this – that it's simply scientific?***

LR: Yes. At DEP here that's not on the plate here. Political intrigue is for others we only look at the type of soils, the tidal flows, the pollution that's now going into the Rahway River, the wetlands rules, I mean ***that's our job here – to look at it environmentally***. We here take everything else off the plate – politics and intrigue are for others. ***Our scientists worked on this really hard - our engineers. I'll tell you that Debbie and others are scaring folks needlessly. It's not what she's saying it is.***

JG: Larry, thank you very much – I appreciate you taking a moment to tell us about this.

LR: You're welcome,.. thank you.

JG: That's Larry Ragonese who is the spokesperson for the DEP.

End Interview