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## ***New Poll Shows Majority Of Prince William Residents Oppose Dominion's Controversial Plan To Dump Waste Water From Its Toxic Coal Ash Ponds to Potomac River***

**Washington DC**— A new poll conducted on behalf of Potomac Riverkeeper Network reveals significant public concern and opposition to Dominion Virginia's plan to clean up five coal ash ponds at its Possum Point Power Station near Quantico, Virginia. Dominion has applied to the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for a modification of its Clean Water Act discharge permit that would allow the facility to drain over 100 million gallons of wastewater from the site's largest coal ash pond and dump it into Quantico Creek and the Potomac River.

The requested permit change would also give Dominion the go ahead to continue discharging untreated coal ash pond water, laced with toxic metals, into Quantico Creek from a recently discovered toe drain. DEQ set limits far too high on metals from one discharge point that would allow toxic levels of metals to be dumped into Virginia waterways, and failed to put any limits at all on the toe drain discharge. This permitting action is part of Dominion's larger plan to permanently close Possum Point's coal ash ponds, in order to comply with new EPA regulations.

Prince William County residents were polled last week about controversial elements in Dominion's plan. The results show that a large majority of residents don't know about the plan even though the public comment period is nearing its end on December 14. Based on the poll results, the more the public learns about Dominion's plan, the less they like it.

Highlights from the Cromer Group poll, a national polling firm, include:

- 83% of residents are unaware of Dominion's plan to dump over 100 million gallons of wastewater into Quantico Creek
- Only 22% say they trust Dominion to safely dispose of the wastewater; and by a margin of 2 to 1 a plurality do not trust Dominion
- And only 1/3 (31%) trust DEQ to oversee disposal of Dominion's waste water
- 69% of residents reject permit approval for Dominion to continue to discharge untreated contaminants from its largest coal ash pond into Quantico Creek with only 13% approving
- 63% feel that the unlined coal ash ponds are a serious threat to the safety of drinking water wells and 20% feel it was somewhat of a threat
- 86% of residents believe they should be notified when over 100 million gallons of wastewater is dumped into Quantico Creek
- Dominion should pay for testing nearby drinking water wells according to 75% of residents and 11% feel the state should pay for testing
- 73% favor delaying approval of Dominion's permit request

“DEQ has received more than 150 comments asking the agency to deny this permit. Virginia State Senators and State Delegates have requested an extension of the public comment deadline to collect more data and provide additional time for review. Now, it is clear from the poll that residents living around Quantico Creek and directly downstream overwhelmingly oppose controversial aspects of Dominion’s permit request,” said Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper. “State regulators need to listen to the people they are supposed to represent and protect, instead of serving the corporate interests of Dominion, which are clearly focused on using Quantico Creek and the Potomac River for waste disposal.”

The survey was conducted December 2-3, posing questions to 580 Prince William County residents who live near Quantico Creek, randomly called to participate in the poll. Among the Prince William County residents interviewed, most lived in portions of Delegate Districts 2 and 52, with some from Delegate District 31, immediately upriver on the two branches of Quantico Creek.

When residents were asked if they favor or oppose giving Dominion the permit for the toe drain that would allow existing contaminants currently seeping from the bottom of its largest coal ash pond to continue without any form of treatment or limits on the amount of contaminants it leaches into the creek, by margins of better than 9:1, Republicans and Democrats are alike in that more than three-quarters of each (75%) oppose granting the permit; and only 8 percent each (Republican and Democrat) favor granting the permit.

In the end, significant majorities of Republicans (74%), Democrats (87%), and Independents (65%) favor delaying Dominion’s permit request until more data is collected and adequate safeguards are in place to ensure the coal ash wastewater isn’t harmful to people, animals, or aquatic life on Quantico Creek.

**Background:** The Possum Point Power Station operated as a coal fired power plant until 2003, when it switched primarily to natural gas. The site includes 5 coal ash ponds, four of which are completely unlined and all of which have been leaking contaminants into groundwater and Quantico Creek for almost thirty years. Pond D, the largest of the five, has the capacity to hold over a billion gallons of toxic ash waste and water and is only partially lined. Coal ash, the waste produced from burning coal to generate electricity, contains a range of metals that are toxic at high levels, including lead, arsenic, chromium, selenium and vanadium.

Coal ash is typically stored in unlined pits that become “ponds” when stormwater flows into them, causing the metals to continuously “seep” and leach out of the ponds, polluting nearby groundwater and waterways. Levels of coal ash metals were found at levels far exceeding Virginia limits in groundwater around the Possum Point facility. Dominion has drained Pond E, with a capacity of 240 million gallons and is moving ash and contaminated coal ash water from four of its coal ash ponds into its largest coal ash Pond D. Possum Point’s coal ash ponds were rated as “Significant Hazard” by EPA in 2010.

On May 6th 2015, Potomac Riverkeeper investigated and sampled an unpermitted industrial waste water discharge from Dominion’s coal ash Pond D. On July 27th, Potomac Riverkeeper presented its findings in person and in a detailed report to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Department of Public Health regarding an engineered “toe drain” discharging toxic metals— including cadmium, selenium, arsenic, vanadium and boron – from the bottom of Pond D.

According to the report prepared by Environmental Stewardship Concepts, the “toe drain” discharge from Pond D “displayed elevated levels of metals and minerals” and high levels of metals in creek sediments show that Quantico Creek “seems to have been contaminated with metals and minerals, and the most obvious and logical source is the water running off from the berm area” at Pond D.

Rather than seek an enforcement action against Dominion, the Virginia DEQ has issued a new draft permit modification that would allow Dominion's "toe drain" discharge to continue indefinitely, with no limits or requirements to treat contaminated waste water. At a November 18th Public Information Meeting on Possum Point, DEQ Program Manager Bryant Thomas acknowledged the new permit would also allow Dominion to drain over 100 millions of gallons of waste water from its coal ash ponds.

DEQ staff issuing the permit admitted the agency does not even know the actual volume of contaminated water draining from the recently discovered toe drain on coal pond D or the volume of water that will be released from pond D as part of the closure process. DEQ also has not assessed the risk to catfish and striped bass which use Quantico Creek and this stretch of the Potomac River for spawning and nursery habitat.

A public hearing has been scheduled for December 8th by DEQ to receive comments on the draft permit modification. The current deadline for public comments is December 14, 2015. Once coal ash ponds are drained, Dominion intends to "cap-in-place" tons of toxic coal ash stored at Possum Point in Pond D, which will remain only partially lined and allow toxic coal ash metals to continue leaching into the environment indefinitely. Potomac Riverkeeper opposes this plan, and supports removing the toxic ash from the site entirely and relocating it into a lined solid waste landfill away from the Potomac River and drinking water supplies. Duke Energy and other Utilities have been required to dispose of coal ash in lined landfills in North and South Carolina.

The public hearing is December 8th at 7:00 pm in the DEQ Northern Regional Office, 13901 Crown Court, Woodbridge, VA 22193.

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Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization with three regional Waterkeeper branches: Potomac Riverkeeper, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper and Shenandoah Riverkeeper. Our mission is to protect the public's right to clean water in our rivers and streams. We stop pollution to promote safe drinking water, protect healthy habitats, and enhance public use and enjoyment.

Website: [www.potomacriverkeepernetwork.org](http://www.potomacriverkeepernetwork.org) Phone: 202.429.2603. For more information contact: Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper 336-809-6041. Poll results and sampling data report are available upon request.