

**From:** [Marge](#)  
**To:** [Sam Imperati Oregon Consensus Assessment](#); [Amelia Webb](#); [Benton County Talks Trash](#); [Mark Henkels](#); [Louisa Shelby](#); [Mary Parmigiani](#); [Ginger Rough](#)  
**Subject:** Latest Draft of History Document, Timeline, and Main Themes  
**Date:** Sunday, January 15, 2023 4:40:59 PM  
**Attachments:** [Main Themes.docx](#)  
[Timeline Coffin Butte Landfill II.docx](#)  
[LANDFILL HISTORY DRAFT Jan 15 A.docx](#)

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Greetings All,

Here is the latest edition of our work which represents a thorough re-write of the history document. We believe this document fits our charge, that calls for a narrative including social context and which was accepted by the larger BCTT oversight group at our last workgroup meeting. We think that the elimination of the social/political history of the landfill would disconnect the overall report from the true reasons why the whole BCTT process was created. Public trust and the ability of the public to make informed decisions about any expansion will be influenced by how they perceive past processes and outcomes.

We removed any references to Joel Geier's work. We worked diligently to excise any perceived editorial remarks from our material. We made a real effort to streamline the document and remove any material that was duplicated or that elaborated on points made elsewhere. It now appears to be quite in line with Sam's guidance (shown below) in the attachment to his email dated December 15. It comes in at less than ten pages with a timeline of one page.

Much of Ginger's document is a pertinent and thoughtful, but abbreviated, version of events that we cover in more detail with references to published materials, particularly articles appearing in the local papers. Given that this BCTT workgroup is the result of an attempt to document and elucidate common understandings across a wide range of pertinent topics, we feel it is highly appropriate to address the misgivings that the Benton County community expressed over time over hosting a landfill. The fact that the landfill location was recognized over time to have suboptimal climate and soil features, yet expansion, sometimes guided by interests beyond Benton County borders, was continually attempted is also crucial to understanding the political and social context today.

A timeline is attached separately, as is a 'Main Themes' document.

Thank you all for your comments, we hope we have addressed your concerns in this latest version.

Respectfully,  
Marge and Mark

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**To:** [Sam Imperati Oregon Consensus Assessment](#); [Benton County Talks Trash](#); [Amelia Webb](#); [Mark Henkels](#); [Ginger Rough](#); [Louisa Shelby](#); [Mary Parmigiani](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Latest Draft of History Document, Timeline, and Main Themes  
**Date:** Sunday, January 15, 2023 5:02:06 PM  
**Attachments:** [image.png](#)  
[Main Themes.docx](#)  
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[LANDFILL HISTORY DRAFT Jan 15 A.docx](#)

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Addendum:

Sorry, I forgot to include the screenshot of Sam's December 15 attachment.

### Guiding Concepts for Writing this Section

- 1) The existing timeline built from newspaper articles will be an appendix.
- 2) A timeline will be created that reflects the history of the area, the rising need for a landfill system in Benton County and the region, when Coffin Butte became a landfill site, and the major points in the history of ownership, operation, oversight and permitting of the landfill.
- 3) We envision an easily readable narrative of 10-15 pages, plus the timeline.
- 4) The environmental and historical context of the Coffin Butte area will be briefly discussed.
- 5) The focal concerns will be how Benton County and the region settled on Coffin Butte as their major landfill site, how ownership and operations of the landfill changed over time, key aspects of how Benton County and the state have done oversight and permitting regarding the site, and key times of public concern regarding the landfill.

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From: **Marge** <[marge@jyo.com](mailto:marge@jyo.com)>  
Date: Sun, Jan 15, 2023 at 4:40 PM  
Subject: Latest Draft of History Document, Timeline, and Main Themes  
To: Sam Imperati Oregon Consensus Assessment <[samimperati@icmresolutions.com](mailto:samimperati@icmresolutions.com)>, Amelia Webb <[AmeliaWebb@icmresolutions.com](mailto:AmeliaWebb@icmresolutions.com)>, [BentonCountyTalksTrash@Co.Benton.OR.US](mailto:BentonCountyTalksTrash@Co.Benton.OR.US) <[bentoncountytalkstrash@co.benton.or.us](mailto:bentoncountytalkstrash@co.benton.or.us)>, Mark Henkels <[henkelm@wou.edu](mailto:henkelm@wou.edu)>, Louisa Shelby <[louisa@peak.org](mailto:louisa@peak.org)>, Mary Parmigiani <[maryparmigiani534@gmail.com](mailto:maryparmigiani534@gmail.com)>, Ginger Rough <[GRough@republicservices.com](mailto:GRough@republicservices.com)>

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## Main Themes

- The siting of the Coffin Butte location as a landfill was random and stemmed from historical uses by Camp Adair in the 1940s. Particularly in the 1970s, alternate sites were explored.
- Its designation as a regional landfill was driven by interests beyond Benton County.
- Coffin Butte Landfill ownership morphed unobtrusively from local ownership to becoming part of a national corporate strategy.
- Historically, the interests of landfill owners and operators and those of the neighbors and other Benton County residents have not always coincided.
- Both remaining landfill capacity and lifespan have been historically overestimated.
- Issues surrounding the Coffin Butte Landfill have been subject to strong public involvement. Periodic conflicts were equably resolved with both parties reporting adequate acceptance. Sometimes expansion was allowed and sometimes not.
- Before the late 2020s, SWAC meeting notices and major upcoming Franchise Agreement renewals were regularly posted in the local papers. There was no public notice found for either the 2020 Franchise Agreement nor for the 2021 CUP application.
- Republic Services has interests beyond Benton County and our region that increase pressure for landfill expansion.

## **Timeline Coffin Butte Landfill (CBL)**

Native Kalapuyans had inhabited the Coffin Butte-Soap Creek area for over 14,000 years.

Early 1700s: European trappers associated with the fur trade were active in the area.

Mid 1800s: Pioneers appeared in the area and began settlements.

Early 1900s: Farming in the area took hold and roads were built to transport produce to markets.

Early 1940s Army begins landfilling and incinerating as part of waste disposal for Camp Adair.

1947 CBL was purchased by a local business for deposit and burning of refuse.

1950s: Bunn Brothers acquired CBL and Corvallis residents were encouraged to use the facility.

1960s: Burning was phased out at CBL. Alternative dump sites were sought because of water pollution issues, but an extension through 1974 was approved.

1970s: Difficulties with water and soil conditions at CBL were noted by DEQ.

1973-4: Despite resident opposition, the regional Chemeketa Region Solid Waste Board approved the use of CBL as a regional disposal center.

1983: Benton County Planning Commission approved an expansion to allow waste intake from three adjoining counties.

1994: Expansion requested by Valley Landfills is unanimously denied by Benton County Board of Commissioners.

1999: Largest fire in the history of Oregon to this point erupts at CBL.

2000: Valley Landfills is acquired by Allied Waste; Landfill franchise agreement renewed to 2020.

2002: Memorandum of Understanding signed to requiring prior approval to emplace waste south of Coffin Butte Rd.

2008: Republic Services merges with Allied Waste and Valley Landfills ownership changes.

2017: Annual intake tonnage roughly doubles from 553,000 tons to 941,000 tons and remains near the 1.1 million ton cap at present.

2020: Landfill Franchise Agreement is renewed through 2040 with clause removing annual tonnage cap based on a successful expansion CUP.

2021: Republic Services applies for a CUP allowing expansion south of Coffin Butte Road. After approval by Solid Waste Advisory Board, CUP is unanimously denied by Planning Commission.

2022: Republic Services withdraws CUP appeal and Benton County Talks Trash (BCTT) Workgroup is formed.

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**CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE COFFIN BUTTE LANDFILL SITUATION**

**Marge Popp <[marge@jyo.com](mailto:marge@jyo.com)>  
and Mark Henkels <[henkelm@wou.edu](mailto:henkelm@wou.edu)>**

**Subcommittee E**

**Benton County Talks Trash**

**January 15, 2023**

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## **The Historical and Geographical Context of the Coffin Butte Landfill**

The Coffin Butte landfill can be thought of as a relatively random product of diverse historical factors. The current Benton County operation evolved in response to a longstanding local need for a place to dispose of refuse, the development of the specific Coffin Butte site through a series of incremental decisions, and the search for lower cost refuse sites in Western Oregon and Washington.

As the science behind landfill siting and maintenance progressed, sites with high rainfall and soils that have low compaction have lost favor. Also, as landfills increase in size, location in remote areas is preferable. Therefore, the newer large-landfills, such as Roosevelt and Columbia Ridge disposal sites, are located east of the Cascades where meteorological, geologic and population density conditions are ideal.<sup>1</sup> Many landfills on the west side of the Cascades have been closed or are in the process of closing. However, the current issue of Coffin Butte is not about closure, but about the manner of expansion.

To explain this history, this essay has three parts: 1) a review of the geographical and historical context of the Coffin Butte location, 2) Benton County's history of landfill decision-making leading up to Coffin Butte becoming the preeminent site for the county and region, and 3) the social context surrounding specific events regarding ownership, operation, and permitting leading to the current facilities and practices found at Coffin Butte in 2023.

### **Section 1: The History and Geography of the Coffin Butte Area**

#### **Geography, Geology and Climate of the Coffin Butte Area**

The Coffin Butte landfill site is located about 7 miles north of Corvallis on Highway 99W. The site is at the intersection of Highway 99 and Coffin Butte Road, immediately west of the E.E. Wilson State Wildlife Refuge. Coffin Butte is at the northern end of Soap Creek Valley, but Soap Creek and its valley continue north along the west side of Coffin Butte before entering the Willamette Valley. While the needs and concerns regarding waste disposal and associated issues affect the entire county, the area most impacted by Coffin Butte operations are the neighboring areas to the north and south along Highway 99W, Soap Creek Valley, the E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area, agricultural areas to the east. These areas are particularly affected by the odors, traffic and litter associated with the landfill.

Coffin Butte itself is approximately 738 feet above sea level. The operating landfill is on the southeastern slope of Coffin Butte, north of Coffin Butte Road, but ancillary facilities such as administrative offices, leachate ponds and a power station fueled by methane from the landfill are located south of Coffin Butte Road. The south-southwest side of Coffin Butte has a rock quarry operated by Knife River. The rock quarry area is currently planned to be the next area of expansion for the landfill unless the permits are changed to allow for Coffin Butte Road to be closed and the landfill to expand to the south to fill in the area between Coffin Butte and Tampico Ridge to the south.

The landfill is located in a topographic divide between the two valleys. Surface water drainage coming off the landfill actually flows into Soap Creek in both west and east directions, before Soap Creek joins the Luckiamute River and the Willamette mainstem.<sup>2</sup> Groundwater flows both east and west from the area of Coffin Butte and Tampico Ridge, depending on the underlying geology.<sup>3</sup> Taylor et al note that there is an unnamed tributary between Coffin Butte and Tampico Ridge and that "associated wetlands drain east-ward toward the E.E. Wilson National Wildlife Refuge."<sup>4</sup> Rainfall in the area is approximately 42 inches a year, with the majority falling between November and May.<sup>5</sup>

The earthquake hazard of this area is significant, particularly because of the Cascade subduction zone. Yu et al note that there have been over 40 great earthquakes of magnitude of over 8 and in 1700 one of magnitude 9. They calculate that, "The current calculated odds that a Cascadia earthquake will occur in the next 50 years range from 7-15 percent for a great earthquake affecting the entire Pacific Northwest..."<sup>6</sup> The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) noted that the Coffin Butte landfill was one of three in Western Oregon that were designed to handle less than an 8.5 magnitude earthquake, well below the possible "Big One" predicted for the region.<sup>7</sup>

### **The History of the Coffin Butte Area**

The archeology and history of the region is of great importance to many people involved in Coffin Butte decision-making. In his oral history of the Soap Creek Valley, Zybach notes how before Western contact, the Pacific Northwest was one of the more densely populated nonagricultural regions of the world. However, with the introduction of smallpox, malaria, measles, influenza, and other diseases from explorers and traders, over 96% of the local Kalapuyan people died within two generations, particularly from malaria in 1831-2.<sup>8</sup>

Tools from the Kalapuyan people have been found throughout the Soap Creek and Coffin Butte area.<sup>9</sup> In 2022, the Oregon State Archeologist, John Pouley, recommended a professional archaeological survey of the proposed expansion area and consultation with all appropriate Native American tribes.<sup>10</sup> One significant cultural practice of the Kalapuyans was the use of annual prescribed fires. Zybach notes this "broadcast burning" served a variety of purposes, including control of unwanted plants (such as Douglas Fir), the enhancement of favored plants (such as camas), easier hunting, and other benefits such as gathering grasshoppers.<sup>11</sup> The Soap Creek Valley was settled early by white pioneers, probably aided by the native American clearing of land by burning.

The area had a colorful history in the 1800s and 1900s. For example, the town of Tampico, located to the south of Coffin Butte in Soap Creek Valley on the Applegate Trail, was briefly a thriving and boisterous place until purchased by the wealthy pioneer Green Berry Smith. A local driving guide notes that, "On January 23, 1860, the pious Smith purchased Tampico and burned the entire town to the ground including stores and homes as well as the saloons, brothels, and gambling dens."<sup>12</sup>

Letitia Carson is one of the most notable pioneers to settle in Soap Creek Valley. A freed African-American slave, Carson came to Oregon with David Carson in 1845. When David died in 1852 her neighbor Greenberry Smith (the same man who burned down Tampico) took advantage of her unclear legal status to sell off her property. Letitia soon moved to Douglas County, but successfully sued Greenberry for \$300 in lost wages and \$1400 for the loss of her cattle and legal costs.<sup>13</sup>

The biggest local change after white settlement occurred in 1941, when the U.S. Army chose to build a huge training base on the site of the town of Wells which was at the center of the present day E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area. Within one month, the town was vacated and houses and barns bulldozed to be replaced by barracks. The camp itself covered an area two miles wide and six miles long with 1800 buildings. The camp was the second largest city in Oregon at the time and housed roughly 40,000 troops. The area that eventually became E. E. Wilson was referred to as "Swamp Adair" due to the constant rain, mud and standing water. The Army built sewer and drainage systems which emptied wetlands and channelized streams.<sup>14</sup>

Following the war, the residential population slowly increased until the 1970s, at which time growth accelerated rapidly. By the 2020s, hundreds of people lived in the regions to the north and south of Coffin Butte and in Soap Creek Valley. Although there is extensive farming along the transit routes leading to Coffin Butte, most area adults commute to work; most homes are on lots less than 10 acres in size; and most families are not directly associated with large-scale farming or forestry practices. But the values generated by 'living on



the land' are still strongly felt. Coffin Butte Road serves as the primary route for Soap Creek residents commuting north to Monmouth-Independence and Salem for work.

Today, the unusually cohesive Soap Creek community works together to restore and maintain the Soap Creek Schoolhouse, a symbol of the valley. Built in 1935 and in use until 1946, the structure was restored by the community and remains a meeting place for local activities and an annual fund-raising event.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Coffin Butte Area Today: Wildlife Habitat and Protection**

Besides the vibrant community in Soap Creek Valley and the historical significance of Camp Adair, this area is noteworthy today as the home to the EE Wilson Wildlife Area, located just across Highway 99W from Coffin Butte Landfill.

#### E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area

The E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area came into existence in 1950 when the U.S. Government gave quitclaim title to the property to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The site was originally built to serve as a US Army cantonment in 1940 and functioned as Camp Adair during the WWII era. The wildlife area covers approximately 1,788 acres of oak woodland, upland shrub and grassland habitats. The refuge management plan's primary goal is to manage the area consistent with conservation and enhancement priorities for native wildlife and production of game species.<sup>16</sup>

The Coffin Butte Landfill and the EE Wilson Wildlife Area are located at the midpoint of a triangle of National Wildlife Refuges. This system of National Wildlife Refuges (refuges or NWRs), managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), was established in the mid-Willamette Valley during the 1960s when the Migratory Bird Commission approved establishment of three refuges: Ankeny, Baskett Slough, and William L. Finley.

The area containing Coffin Butte Landfill is part of a wildlife corridor and refuge system connecting the Basket Slough, Ankeny, Luckiamute and E. E. Wilson refuges to the William L. Finley refuge south of Corvallis on through to the Fern Ridge Wildlife area near Eugene. Soap Creek Valley, E.E. Wilson Refuge and entire area surrounding the landfill has been identified by Benton County as a high priority area for conservation actions to benefit key local species.<sup>17</sup> Tampico Ridge, the next ridge immediately south of Coffin Butte, hosts a complex mix of habitats, particularly Oak Savannah, and is the site of an ongoing research project looking at plant succession being conducted by Western Oregon University faculty and students.<sup>18</sup>

### **Benton County Confronts Its Waste Issues: Up to 1983<sup>19</sup>**

Waste disposal was simple in the early days of Benton County. What little waste there was could simply be deposited into rivers, ravines, or anywhere convenient. Dumping along roadsides was particularly favored. Over time, however, unsystematic dumping created health and sanitation problems, and eyesores. For example, on July 27, 1906, The *Corvallis Gazette* advised: "Another thing in connection to cleaning up, don't dump your trash, dead cats, dogs, and other rubbish onto the vacant lot just over the fence". By May 15, 1911, Corvallis residents could use a "garbage ground" available just a ferry ride across the river and in June 1921, the *Daily Gazette-Times* advised residents to burn their refuse rather than dispose of it in nearby streams. By May 7, 1937, the *Gazette-Times* was reporting on the city dump's location by Kiger Island, and reminding citizens they would be fined if they continue to simply dump their trash along roads.

By April 5, 1950, Benton County had established a free dump at the Coffin Butte Site. By April 8, 1954, Robert and Daniel Bunn owned and operated Corvallis Disposal and the Coffin Butte dumpsite, and the *Gazette Times* boasted of the clean efficient service. But roadside dumping remained a problem for decades even after

commercial trash pickup was extended to nearly all parts of the county by 1964, roadside dumping remained a challenge. (June 24, 1966)

The late 1960s brought changing attitudes towards traditional practices of burning and dumping. By 1967 burning was being phased out at Coffin Butte as it evolved to be a landfill operation involving covering and sealing refuse. Accordingly, the volume of waste became an increasing problem. The early 1970s brought pressure to re-locate the dump and the exploration of several alternate approaches to disposal. As early as October 9, 1969, Corvallis Disposal began looking for an alternate landfill site and had begun negotiating with Oregon State University to use lands east of Corvallis for that purpose. In March 19, 1971, County Sanitarian Roger Hayden speculated that one day soon Benton County would be barging its wastes down river to a regional site where proper sorting and recycling could take place, but without a ready alternative, in November of 1971, the County Commissioners approved an extension of Corvallis Disposal to use the Coffin Butte area as a landfill until December 31, 1974. Still complications relating to the landfill were ongoing and in 1972, Robert Bunn, still owning and operating the Corvallis Disposal, noted that in the past he had to attend only one meeting per year on sanitation issues, but now he had sometimes 11 in a week. In preparation for change, Corvallis Disposal negotiated a 99-year lease option on the "Granger" site on the Independence Road near Highway 20 where they hoped to develop a landfill despite some concerns about the proximity of the Willamette River. (August 26, 1972).

The push for closing Coffin Butte was reinforced by the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) which encouraged the development of proper regional landfill sites. Benton County Sanitarian Roger Hayden said at the time that eventually local solid waste would have to be taken to the Eastern side of the state since Western Oregon had location, water, and soil condition difficulties. (May 12, 1972)

Despite the opposition of local residents, however, county and regional officials acting through the Chemeketa Region Solid Waste Board meeting in McMinnville, Yamhill County, approved the use of Coffin Butte as a regional disposal site because of its lower cost, present use as a disposal site, and its potential for development as a recycling center. (November 21, 1973). The County Commission hearings on whether Coffin Butte should become a regional disposal center featured significant public opposition, especially by the North Benton Citizens Advisory Group. Opposition noted concerns over water contamination issues and property values, but the Chemeketa group, which represented five counties and other officials strongly supported the Benton county site over proposed alternatives. (April 4, 1974).

Despite a meeting of over 3.5 hours in Adair Village, where 75 citizens gave testimony and the submission of a petition with over 200 signatures, the Benton County Planning Commission approved the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for the Coffin Butte to become the regional disposal site. People in the meeting noted they had purchased their lands with the understanding the landfill would be closed and also noted that it seemed that Benton County bore the brunt of the region's refuse problems. (March 6, 1974)

Pressures for expansion renewed by 1981, notably with the closure of the Roche Road landfill in Linn County. The next level of expansion for Coffin Butte came in 1983 when the Benton County Planning Commission approved another expansion that they estimated would "add half a century to the dump's useful life." (April 27, 1983) Although this expansion provoked less protest than in the early 1970s, the North Benton CAC specified that there would be no disposal of municipal solid waste on the 59.23 A(cre) property south of Coffin Butte Road, a similar stipulation as requested to the 2021 CUP application.<sup>20</sup>

During the 1980s, the landfill operator purchased several properties surrounding the landfill, some belonging to residents whose water supplies were compromised as a result of landfill operations. One household well in sediments west of the landfill, on the former Helms home site, received sufficient contamination from the landfill site that the well had to be decommissioned under DEQ supervision.<sup>21</sup>

### **Coffin Butte Landfill History: Operating as a Landfill, 1983-2010<sup>22</sup>**

In the early 1980s, plans for Coffin Butte began to evolve, driven by increasing demand to expand the volume embedded at the site and changes in ownership. The 1983 Benton County decision to allow Linn County waste operators to use Coffin Butte generated significant attention and a new 'landfill site' zone was created for the 266-acre CBL site and the site development plan allowed Valley Landfills to expand the dumping site by 10 acres immediately. This expansion was estimated to, "add half a century to the dump's useful life." (April 27, 1983). There was also a specification that there would be no disposal of municipal solid waste on the southside of Coffin Butte Road, a similar stipulation that citizens requested in the 2021 CUP application process.(April 27, 1983)<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding ongoing, and continuing concerns regarding the problems of waste along Highway 99W and other roads leading to Coffin Butte, in the mid-1980s the landfill operated with relatively little controversy. The vision that the existing footprint would be adequate for decades to come was reinforced by Valley Landfills purchase of a 'Horizontal Fixed Hammer Hog' which will 'pig out' on wood, 'eating' all sorts of wood debris and scrap lumber and extend the landfill life for "another 60 or 70 years."(August 26, 1990)

In 1994, Coffin Butte seemed to be operating very well. A GT article from July 21, 1994 noted that Benton County officials increased the franchise fee for Coffin Butte Landfill from \$500 annually to approximately \$86,000 or 1% of gross revenues. Environmentalists and others were pleased to see progress on the \$2.4 million power plant that would generate electricity from the landfill's methane. (September 1, 1994) The Coffin Butte Landfill Annual Review of Operations for 1994 actually noted a decline in the amount being dumped at the site that was expected to continue, having a tonnage of 258,472 in 1994, down from a peak of 317,628 in 1992, reflecting the demolition of the James River Paper Plant in Linn County.<sup>24</sup>

But the same year, Valley Landfill again requested to expand its Coffin Butte operations, seeking to rezone 26 rural residential acres to landfill use from its current use in hay and other fields irrigated with leachate. As noted in the *Gazette Times* on November 3, 1994, this request encountered stiff opposition by landfill neighbors and other county residents concerned about smell, noise, groundwater contamination and how the expansion would harm the natural beauty of the area. About 50 people attended a Board of Commissioners' meeting and the additional submitted comments were numerous.

The active citizen's perspectives in 1994 are similar to those generated in the 2020s. Community members argued that approval of the expansion by the County Commission after the extensive public testimony would show a lack of concern about what the community thinks. Specifically concerns regarded the potential impact on springs and water supplies of local residents, that the change would be an exception to our state land-use goals, and how it could set precedent for even more massive change in dumping wastes in the future. Citizens also testified that: 1) eventually the county would have to close Coffin Butte Road, a critical emergency route; 2) they had existing concerns about traffic, noise, smells, and roadside litter; and 3) that potential earthquake damage to liners could cause contaminants to seep into the underground water supply.(November 3, 1994; November 14, 1994) After delaying the vote at an earlier date, in a December 14, 1994 hearing, the Board of Commissioners denied the expansion unanimously. One Commissioner declared that, "the Willamette Valley is not a good place for landfills". (December 15, 1994)

Expansion of Coffin Butte landfill was on the backburner through the rest of the 1990s. Public worries about spillages and other issues regarding leachate processing seemed to be resolved through cooperation between the landfill management and neighbors. (April 27, 1996, also December 17, 1997) Meanwhile, the county considered its relationship with the Landfill to be 'absolutely wonderful.' (August 12, 1996)

By 1997, the Landfill property had grown to 790 acres and was serving seven counties. Meeting tombstones regularly reported in the local paper by the county Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) show that the public was invited to hearings that were held to approve the extension of services to each of these counties

The second half of 1999 was eventful for Coffin Butte. On August 24, the 1999 landfill fire, which was reported to have been the biggest fire in Oregon history up to that date, took hold at about 6:30 PM. (August 25, 1998) Probably more notable in the long run, on December 14, 1999, after 40 years of operating Corvallis Disposal and Coffin Butte Landfill, the Bunn Family announced they had sold their operation to Allied Waste Industries, the second largest solid waste services company in the world. Residents were assured “We’re really excited about these guys, they run pretty decentralized just like we do...you won’t see any change.” (December 15, 1999)

Operations at Coffin Butte operated with relatively little change in the early 2000s. Throughout this period, the Solid Waste Advisory Council was very active, frequently posting notices in the local paper. In November of 2002, the Benton County Board of Commissioners signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Valley Landfills stating that Valley Landfills, Inc (VLI), “will not conduct, without the prior approval of Benton County and the State of Oregon, the placement of solid waste on the approximate 56 acres, within the landfill zone which it owns south of Coffin Butte Road.”<sup>25</sup>

In 2008, Republic Services merged with Allied Waste Industries, and acquired control over the Coffin Butte facility. Republic Services, headquartered in Phoenix has managed the landfill since.

### **Coffin Butte Landfill: The Contemporary Context**

Rate increases occurred throughout the 2000s and 2010s with relatively little public concern. In 2018, that changed when Republic Services announced that the tipping rate would rise from \$28.75 a load to \$85.75. Republic Services said the rate increase sought to discourage the general public from bringing their trash to the landfill as this interfered with high-ticket commercial haulers, which outraged rural residents who had few transfer station facilities to dispose of waste. (December 7, 2018) After a testy well-attended Board of Commissioners meeting, Republic Services dropped the rate to \$40, still a 39% price hike. (December 19, 2018) Benton County does not have authority to regulate the rates Republic charges, but there was leverage in 2018 since the county was in the process of negotiating a franchise fee for the company to operate in the county which was expiring in 2020.

The current pressure for expansion is inexorably tied to the volume emplaced in Coffin Butte. The capacity issue is discussed in great detail in another section of this report, but there is a historical component to it. This volume deposited varied somewhat from 1993 to 2016, but almost doubled in 2017 and remained at that higher level to the present. Using information from the Coffin Butte Annual PRC reports, the volume emplaced between 1993-1999 averaged about 349,000 tons, in 2001-2009 the average was 536,000 tons and between 2010-2016 the volume averaged 497,000 tons. Between 2017-2021 the average doubled to 979,000 tons.<sup>26</sup> Some of the increase in 2017 might be explained by an unusual escalation in volume coming from Washington County that leapt from 49,000 tons in 2016 to 254,000 tons in 2017, an increase of 418%. But Washington County’s share of the total tonnage received accounts for less than 10%. In terms of tonnage increase from 2000 to 2020, Marion County’s contribution rose from 11% to 21%. Marion is the only county whose relative contribution increased more than one percentage point over that period when all but two of the other contributor counties’ shares have fallen.<sup>27</sup>

The current Benton County Talks Trash(BCTT) process is a reaction to specific decisions made by Benton County officials and Republic Services regarding three situations. First, the public process and outcome of December 2020 franchise agreement between Benton County and Republic Services regarding the operation

of Coffin Butte created the legal context and colors the current political context. Second, the BCTT process is heavily focused on the issues raised when Republic Services applied for a Conditional Use Permit to expand landfill operations south of Coffin Butte Road in 2021, an application approved by the SWAC, but unanimously rejected by the county Planning Committee. The third action leading to the creation of the BCTT process was the decision of Republic Services to not appeal the Planning Commission decision and instead request another CUP in the future and the County Commission's decision to prepare the county for the request.

In the meantime, Benton County also negotiated a separate, not directly related, franchise agreement for trash hauling with Republic Services. County officials viewed this process very positively. That franchise fee agreement was settled on June 7, 2022 with a ten-year agreement, with the possibility of re-negotiation July 1, 2024. As County Commissioner Xan Augerot observed, "... while county officials have a long-standing working relationship of trust with Republic's local staff, many members of the community haven't been party to that." (June 9, 2022) One explanation for the disconnect between county officials and their constituents is the apparent breakdown in communication between citizens and officials regarding landfill issues, as became very apparent in the process creating a new franchise agreement over Coffin Butte itself signed in mid-December 2020, which assumed an expansion of the landfill.

Unlike the prior franchise negotiations that led to the signing of the 2000 franchise, a review of the local newspapers through 2020 when the landfill franchise agreement was being negotiated did not reveal any announcements about the process nor did the public seem to be made aware of this new franchise agreement in any way. At the Board of Commissioners meeting to vote on the franchise agreement, the county attorney attested that there were no public comments.<sup>28</sup> Members of the SWAC acknowledged that they were told that this was not a matter for their consideration. This is surprising in light of the fact that a September 2020 solicitation notice for Advisory Board membership explicitly states 'review franchise agreements' as a primary responsibility. (September 8, 2020)

The 2020 franchise agreement over landfill operations enhanced the financial incentives of the county for increased tipping. Under the 2020 agreement, Benton County receives compensation in two forms. The "franchise fee" given for allowing the landfill to operate starts at \$2 million in 2021 and rises to \$3.5 million by 2024. The agreement was designed to financially pressure the county to favor increased volume of disposal and the expansion of the landfill by the addition of a "host fee" compensation model. The "host fee" starts at \$2.87 per ton of waste in 2021 to \$3.99 per ton in 2024. Before the county receives the "host fee", however, the franchise fee is first subtracted from the per ton charge. If too little is disposed of, the county may receive no host fee and the county is rewarded if more waste goes to Coffin Butte. As the franchise fee goes up, the volume required to receive the host fee also goes up. Furthermore, the fees go up slightly if the landfill expansion is approved by 2023, and will go down slightly if the landfill expansion is not approved by 2025.<sup>29</sup> Before the vote to sign the franchise agreement, Benton County Counsel Vance Croney stated that Republic Services maintained that its ability to pay higher fees was dependent on reducing cost or increasing capacity.<sup>30</sup><sup>31</sup> In contrast to the image of Republic's Services' finances as represented by Croney, in January 2021 the company reported \$2.5 Billion of Cash Flow from Operations and Over \$1.2 Billion of Adjusted Free Cash Flow and returned \$621 million in cash to shareholders in 2020.<sup>32</sup>

In May, 2021, Republic Services submitted an application to Benton County for a Conditional Use Permit to expand the landfill. At the July 28, 2021 meeting, the Benton County Solid Waste Advisory Committee 'strongly supported' the CUP according to a memo submitted to the Planning Commission the next day. A search of the local papers did not reveal a public notice regarding the 2020 Franchise Agreement process nor the Republic Services CUP request that followed, but by August, members of the local community formed a coordinated effort to educate themselves and fellow Benton County residents regarding what could be a doubling of the size of the Coffin Butte Landfill. Letters to the editor, critical of the planned expansion began to appear in the local papers and public meetings were well-attended by folks objecting to the expansion.<sup>33</sup> Reporting at the

time also noted Croney's financial arguments in favor of the expansion, particularly the revenue implications and possible future costs of disposal for county residents of denying the expansion request. (October 31, 2021, November 12, 2021) These arguments engendered a *Gazette Times* editorial endorsing the expansion.(December 2, 2021)

Public notice of the Planning Commission Hearing for the Republic Services CUP application LU-21-047 (this is the planning commission's label for this specific process) regarding the Coffin Butte Landfill appeared in the local papers on October 14. Public outcry had been building over the past few months as residents began to understand the ramifications of the 2020 Franchise Agreement and the corresponding CUP which proposed extending the landfill area south of Coffin Butte Road, which had long been viewed locally as a 'case closed' impossibility given the 1983 and 1994 agreements. During the period leading up to first LU-21-047 Planning Commission meeting, neighbors of the landfill and residents throughout the county wrote numerous letters to the editor in the local papers, convened meetings and gathered data regarding the proposed expansion. The first LU-21-047 Planning Commission meeting generated so much ire that over a hundred residents signed up to testify at the 4.5 hour hearing and a second meeting had to be scheduled to listen to public comment. The more than 30 citizens speaking at the November 2, 2021 and the November 16, 2021 Planning Commission hearings, all opposed the expansion.(December 8, 2021). Objections raised in public comments in this process are partially why the County Commission created the Benton County Talks Trash process.

On December 7, 2021, the Planning Commission unanimously denied the LU-21-047 CUP.

Republic Services filed an appeal to the County Commission, but on March 15, 2022 the company informed the Board of Commissioners that they would pull the appeal. Meanwhile, over the period from October of 2021 to January of 2022 the membership of the Solid Waste Advisory Council changed radically as four members resigned without comment and new members were appointed.

The Benton County Board of Commissioners, seeking to find common ground between the very strong community resistance to the landfill and the operators, Republic Services, hired a consultant from Oregon Consensus and an Assessment Report was filed on July 12, 2022. This led to the Solid Waste Process Workgroup "Benton County Talks Trash" being formed. The first Solid Waste Process Workgroup meeting convened on September 8, 2022. According to its charter, Benton County Solid Waste Process Workgroup, also entitled BCTT (Benton County Talks Trash), is charged by the Benton County Commissioners to serve as a "bridge" process between past events and next steps. The process is designed to reset the current dynamics with the development of "common understandings" and recommended protocols for the future substantive consideration of the solid waste issues.

The workgroup charges are reflected in the subcommittees that have been formed to drill down into clarifying aspects of solid waste management in Benton County. The workgroup must arrive at common understandings regarding the landfill and the pending Republic Services CUP, the legalities surrounding the relationship between the Republic Services and Benton County, preparing for the creation of a Sustainable Materials Management Plan, and formulating effective communication channels between Benton County and its residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Republic Services, "Roosevelt Landfill Site: FAQs". <https://www.republicservices.com/roosevelt-landfill>

<sup>2</sup> Zybach, Bob. Oregon State University "Using oral histories to document changing forest cover patterns : Soap Creek Valley, Oregon, 1500-1999", Masters Thesis: Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (M.A.I.S.), Oregon State University,

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<sup>3</sup> Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, "Coffin Butte: Record of Decision", October 2005, p. 4.

[https://www.deq.state.or.us/Webdocs/Controls/Output/PdfHandler.ashx?p=a9aeec5b-8ac7-4658-b0e5-d475ca0c6ebd.pdf&s=CoffinButteROD\(10-05\).pdf](https://www.deq.state.or.us/Webdocs/Controls/Output/PdfHandler.ashx?p=a9aeec5b-8ac7-4658-b0e5-d475ca0c6ebd.pdf&s=CoffinButteROD(10-05).pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, Steve, Bryan Dutton, and Pete Poston. "Luckiamute River Watershed, Upper Willamette Basin: An Integrated Environmental Study for K-12 Educators".

<sup>5</sup> Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, "Coffin Butte: Record of Decision", October 2005, p. 3.

[https://www.deq.state.or.us/Webdocs/Controls/Output/PdfHandler.ashx?p=a9aeec5b-8ac7-4658-b0e5-d475ca0c6ebd.pdf&s=CoffinButteROD\(10-05\).pdf](https://www.deq.state.or.us/Webdocs/Controls/Output/PdfHandler.ashx?p=a9aeec5b-8ac7-4658-b0e5-d475ca0c6ebd.pdf&s=CoffinButteROD(10-05).pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Yu, Q.-S, J Wilson, and Y, Yang. "Overview of the Oregon Resilience Plan for Next Cascadia Earthquake and Tsunami". *Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> National Conference in Earthquake Engineering*, Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, Anchorage, AK, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Learn, "Bigger Yamhill Landfill OK'ed". *The Oregonian* (May 31, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Zybach, 2000, p. 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 120.

<sup>10</sup> 2022 Conditional Use Permit Staff Report. Benton County Development Department. **File No.** LU-21-047

<sup>11</sup> Zybach, 2000, pp. 118-119.

<sup>12</sup> "Northwest Benton County Route". Benton County, Oregon. <

[https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/historic\\_resources\\_commission/page/6876/driving\\_tour\\_part\\_ii.pdf](https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/historic_resources_commission/page/6876/driving_tour_part_ii.pdf)>

<sup>13</sup> Leticia Carson Legacy Project. Oregon State University. < <https://letitiacarson.oregonstate.edu/about-letitia-carson/>>

<sup>14</sup> Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Visitor Guide: E.E. Wilson Wildlife Area History".

<[https://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/visitors/ee\\_wilson\\_wildlife\\_area/history.asp](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/visitors/ee_wilson_wildlife_area/history.asp)>

<sup>15</sup> Historic Soap Creek Schoolhouse Foundation, "Soap Creek Schoolhouse", 2021.

<<https://soapcreekschoolhouse.org/index.html>>

<sup>16</sup> Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, EE Wilson Wildlife Management Plan (Updated January 2019)

[https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management\\_plans/wildlife\\_areas/docs/ee\\_wilson.pdf](https://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/wildlife_areas/docs/ee_wilson.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> For one example, see: "Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Program", Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department, 2010. [https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/20770/BentonCo\\_001-13\\_ADOPTION.PDF?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/20770/BentonCo_001-13_ADOPTION.PDF?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>18</sup> Dickey, Eric. "Tampico Ridge LTER Provides Research Opportunities for WOU Students." Western Oregon University. May 14, 2021. <https://wou.edu/research/2021/05/14/tampico-ridge-lter-provides-research-opportunities-for-wou-students/>. A video of this project can be found at <https://www2.wou.edu/nora/woutv.video.viewer?videoid=1754>

<sup>19</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all information here is from the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*.

<sup>20</sup> North Benton County Citizen's Advisory Council submission, Benton County File PC-83-07-c(5)

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, Bob and Gordon Brown, "1993 Coffin Butte Annual Report", July 19, 1994. P. 4

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<sup>22</sup> References in this section are from the *Corvallis Gazette Times* or *Albany Democrat Herald*, which generally share their reporting on these issues.

<sup>23</sup> Affirmation of the "IV Workgroup Recommendations" from draft\_report\_iv\_a\_common\_understandings\_1\_a\_solid\_waste\_history, 2022

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, Bob and Gordon Brown, Benton County Environmental Health Division. *Coffin Butte Landfill Annual Review 1994 Operations*. August 22, 1995. P. 4

<sup>25</sup> "Memorandum of Understanding Relating to Land Use Issues". Benton County and Valley Landfills, Inc (2002)

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<sup>26</sup> Benton County Trash Talks, "Data from Coffin Butte Landfill Annual Reports – 2014-2021",

[https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community\\_development/page/8317/data\\_from\\_coffin\\_butte\\_landfill\\_annual\\_reports.pdf](https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/8317/data_from_coffin_butte_landfill_annual_reports.pdf)

<sup>27</sup>Data from Coffin Butte Landfill PRC Annual Reports 1999-2012, hardcopies stored at Benton County offices, 2013 Report missing.

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<sup>28</sup> Benton County Commissioner Meeting, December 15, 2020. From recording archive.

<sup>29</sup> Benton County/Valley Landfills, Inc. Franchise Agreement. PP. 5-6.

[https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community\\_development/page/8136/valley\\_landfills\\_landfill\\_franchise\\_agrmt\\_2020.pdf](https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/8136/valley_landfills_landfill_franchise_agrmt_2020.pdf)>

<sup>31</sup> Benton County Board of Commissioners Meeting. December 15, 2000. Recording.

<sup>32</sup> "Republic Services, Inc. Reports Fourth Quarter and Full-Year Results; Provides 2021 Full-Year Guidance". Republic Service News Release. February 22, 2021. <https://investor.republicservices.com/node/23311/pdf>

<sup>33</sup> There were at least three letters alone on October 20, 2021. The letters emphasized that the waste was overwhelmingly from outside of Benton County, transportation implications of an enlarged facility, and impacts on a great blue heron rookery. Another news article from that day discussed the hearing that Republic Services held to explain their plan.