

CCA MS Position on the Richton Salt Dome Project

The federal government, through the Department of Energy strategic oil reserve system has proposed drawing *50 million gallons of water per day* from the Pascagoula River. This water will be pumped into the Richton Salt Dome to dissolve the massive salt deposit and pump the resulting high salinity brine into Mississippi Gulf Coast waters for over 5 years.

The Pascagoula River supports multiple uses and is known for being the last river in its size class in the lower forty-eight (48) contiguous states without a dam on its main channel. The river supports a rich freshwater fishery and its freshwater discharge is vital to marine fisheries of the Mississippi Sound. It is also the habitat of several endangered species, including the spawning ground for the endangered Gulf Sturgeon.

The Pascagoula River has consumptive and non-consumptive uses, including, but not limited to, agricultural, industrial, municipal and domestic uses, assimilative water capacity, recreation, navigation, fish and wildlife resources, and other ecologic values, estuarine resources, aquifer recharge and aesthetics. Reducing the flow of the Pascagoula River will increase the salinity of coastal waters by reducing dilution and change the river's environment, adversely affecting the local freshwater fishery by causing migration of saltwater further up the Pascagoula River.

The historic record of government-run brine pipelines, according to the federal government's own environmental impact statement, is a record of multiple annual spills of large quantities of brine, and this is in reference to a pipeline about one tenth the length required for the proposed Richton Salt Dome project. The reasons for the spills are noted in this report as corrosion and erosion due to the high salinity of the brine pumped through the pipeline. The brine would then be discharged into Mississippi Gulf Waters.

With 50 million gallons of fresh water removed from the Pascagoula River per day, the dilution effect on gulf waters is reduced. The 50 million gallons of brine per day pumped into Mississippi waters will additionally increase the salinity of our waters.

Water with higher than normal salinity does not have the oxygen carrying capacity of normal seawater. Lower oxygen content and the higher than normal salt content will kill bottom dwelling marine life, including oysters and shrimp and will either kill or drive normal fin-fish populations out of the effected area. Based on statements in the government's own environmental impact statement, this release of brine in Mississippi waters will create a dead zone in our coastal waters.

While Coastal Conservation Association Mississippi is not an environmental organization, we are strongly opposed to any environmental changes to the Pascagoula River and Mississippi Coastal waters that may adversely affect Mississippi's fishery.

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