Lahaina Injection Wells Plaintiffs Host Public Webinar to Discuss Implications and Next Steps

Community groups host an in-depth webinar discussion on the Supreme Court’s Clean Water Act ruling related to the Lahaina Injection Wells.

WAILUKU, HAWAI – On Tuesday, May 19 at 6:00pm, four Maui community groups will host a public webinar to share information, discuss implications, and to answer questions about next steps following the landmark April 23 Supreme Court ruling related to the Lahaina injection wells.

The Supreme Court’s historic 6 - 3 ruling reaffirms over 40 years of Environmental Protection Agency interpretation that the Clean Water Act regulates discharges of pollutants that reach surface water through groundwater. The Court stated that a permit is required whenever “the addition of the pollutants [from a point source] through groundwater is the functional equivalent of a direct discharge from the point source into navigable waters.”

The case involves Maui County’s wastewater treatment plant in Lahaina, which pumps millions of gallons of treated sewage into the groundwater each day using underground injection wells. The county designed these injection wells to use the groundwater beneath the Lahaina facility to carry the treated sewage to the nearby ocean, where the nutrient-laden wastewater has been destroying a formerly pristine coral reef at Hā’enanui in West Maui, off Kahekili Beach Park.

“This decision is a huge victory for clean water,” said Earthjustice attorney David Henkin, who represented the Maui community groups in the Supreme Court. “It will allow EPA, states like Hawai’i that administer the Act, and citizens to continue to build on a decades-old legacy of using the Clean Water Act to protect our nation’s surface waters from factories, mines, sewage treatment plants, pipelines, factory farms, and other industrial activities that pollute those surface waters via groundwater.”
“This webinar is an opportunity to clarify the victory, implications of the ruling, and next steps for the injection wells.”

The event will feature guest speakers David Henkin (Attorney, Earthjustice), Hannah Bernard (Executive Director, Hawai‘i Wildlife Fund), Lance Collins (Spokesperson, West Maui Preservation Association), and Wendy Wiltse, PhD. (former EPA Coral Reef Ecologist) and is hosted by Sierra Club Maui, Hawai‘i Wildlife Fund, West Maui Preservation Association, and Surfrider Foundation Maui Chapter.

The webinar will be live-streamed via Facebook Live bit.ly/cwa-0519 and Akaku Channel 54.

This victory came in litigation brought by Hawai‘i Wildlife Fund, Sierra Club-Maui Group, Surfrider Foundation, and West Maui Preservation Association, represented by Earthjustice, to force the County of Maui to secure a Clean Water Act permit to control daily discharges of millions of gallons of treated sewage from injection wells at the Lahaina Wastewater Reclamation Facility.

“The County now has a choice between delaying the inevitable by wasting more taxpayer money on litigation, or investing that money to fix the problem, as we've been urging since day one,” said Hannah Bernard of Hawai‘i Wildlife Fund. “Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities for re-use of the Lahaina facility’s treated wastewater, which would both keep pollutants off the reef and satisfy West Maui’s demand for irrigation water, a real win-win.”

In addition to the webinar, the groups have also released a detailed FAQ to further support the public’s understanding of this important case that can be accessed at Hawai‘i Wildlife Fund’s website www.wildhawaii.org.

Contacts

Hannah Bernard
Executive Director
Hawai‘i Wildlife Fund
P.O. Box 790637
Paia, HI 96779
c: (808)280-8124
e: wild@aloha.net
w: www.wildhawaii.org