

“Drinking Water and Pig Poop Shouldn’t Mix,” by Dr. Chris Jones

Clear, clean, unpolluted water is necessary to sustain life, including human life. In recent years, our nation’s dangerous problems with lead pipes have proved just one example of our challenges to keep our water safe.

But it’s not the only challenge. In Arkansas, we’ve seen serious problems with polluted fertilizer and animal-waste runoffs from farms, particularly from hog farms, into our natural waterways.

Last October, the Arkansas Environmental Commission voted to permanently ban hog farms from the Buffalo River Watershed to protect the river and tributaries from pollution. This decision came after years of debate and concern over the impact of large-scale hog farming on one of our state's most precious natural resources.

But today, Arkansas stands at a critical juncture regarding this stewardship of our precious water resources. [Senate Bill 84](#) (SB84) proposes *to prohibit* state agencies from enacting moratoriums on issuing permits in watersheds and other sensitive bodies of water. While the bill seeks to streamline processes, it seriously risks undermining our ability to protect vital ecosystems, like the Buffalo River watershed.

A good friend of mine, Steve Grappe, who has raised hogs on his farm for years, shared his insights with me recently. It was eye-opening, to say the least. Steve said, "As someone who has raised hogs for years, I've seen firsthand the challenges of managing waste and protecting our water resources. It's a delicate balance between agricultural needs and environmental stewardship. The Buffalo River and our other waterways are treasures that deserve protection. We need smart regulations that allow farmers to operate responsibly while safeguarding our natural heritage for future generations."

The stakes are also personal for me. One of my first research projects at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) involved building a laser to measure the turbidity, or muddiness, of water in real time. That work taught me the vital importance of clean water—not just for drinking but for the health of entire ecosystems. High turbidity often indicates pollution or other environmental stressors, and without intervention, it can devastate aquatic life and communities relying on that water.

And let's be clear, pig poop can lead to high turbidity.

In fact, a single hog can produce up to 8 pounds of manure per day. Multiply that by thousands of hogs in large-scale operations, and the potential for water pollution becomes staggering.

Problems and a Solution

SB84's restrictions on moratoriums could make it harder for agencies like the state Department of Agriculture or the Department of Energy and Environment to pause and evaluate activities that might harm our water quality. Without this authority, we risk approving projects that degrade our watersheds, allowing pollutants to flow unchecked and threatening the natural balance of our environment.

But there is a solution. Let agencies do their protective jobs. Instead of an outright ban, we should advocate for policies that allow temporary moratoriums when evidence points to potential harm. This would provide agencies the time to conduct thorough assessments, ensuring responsible permitting that balances economic growth with environmental protection.

This could also allow farmers to meet their responsibilities in protecting the environment while earning a living and aiding the economy. **It's not about choosing between agriculture and clean water—it's about finding ways to support both.**

Call to Action

The time to act is now, Arkansans. Our state's natural beauty and the health of our communities are at stake. Here's what you can do today to safeguard our water resources:

1. **Contact your legislators:**
2. **Educate yourself and others:**
3. **Support local conservation efforts:**

Remember, every voice counts in this crucial debate. By acting today, you can help ensure that future generations inherit clean and vibrant ecosystems. Ask yourself:

Which Arkansas do you want to live in? One with pristine rivers and thriving wildlife, or one where our waterways are at risk?

Together, we can preserve the natural beauty and resources that make Arkansas the Natural State. That's good for both Arkansas's ecology and economy.

Share your thoughts and comments at chrisjoneslistens@gmail.com.