



POLITICS

Controversial Odenton landfill project delayed by possible threat to endangered bat population

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A long-running rubble landfill project slated for a property in Odenton is facing another setback after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service alerted the state to an endangered bat population that may inhabit the area.

While the Maryland Department of the Environment tentatively agreed to grant the developers, National Waste Managers, Inc., a permit to dispose of refuse at the site back in February, it took public feedback until May 1. On the final day of the comment period, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior, alerted the state to a species of bats, northern long-eared bats, it believes may be on or near the site. The state is now requiring the developer to complete an assessment of the threat to the bats.

The proposed Chesapeake Terrace Rubble Landfill has been in the works for more than 30 years and been the subject of significant pushback from residents as well as a hot subject in last year's Anne Arundel County executive race.

The landfill would be located on Patuxent Road and its western edge would run along an Amtrak railway. On the other side of the tracks lies the Patuxent Research Refuge which is overseen and protected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The 13,000 acre plot includes forests, meadows and wetlands and numerous animal species.

Between 2012 and 2017 the service conducted acoustic bat surveys to assess if the species existed at the refuge, said Jennifer Greiner, refuge manager. While these tests are not definitive, the service determined it was probable the bats were at the site based on location and bat call.

A northern long-eared bat. (Wisconsin Department of Natural, AP Photo)

Greiner said the data the team collected suggests the bats have made homes in a forest within the refuge that currently extends over into the landfill site.

"Bats don't recognize the refuge boundary; they rely on the habitat type, which underscores the importance of contiguous habitat corridors," she said in an email.

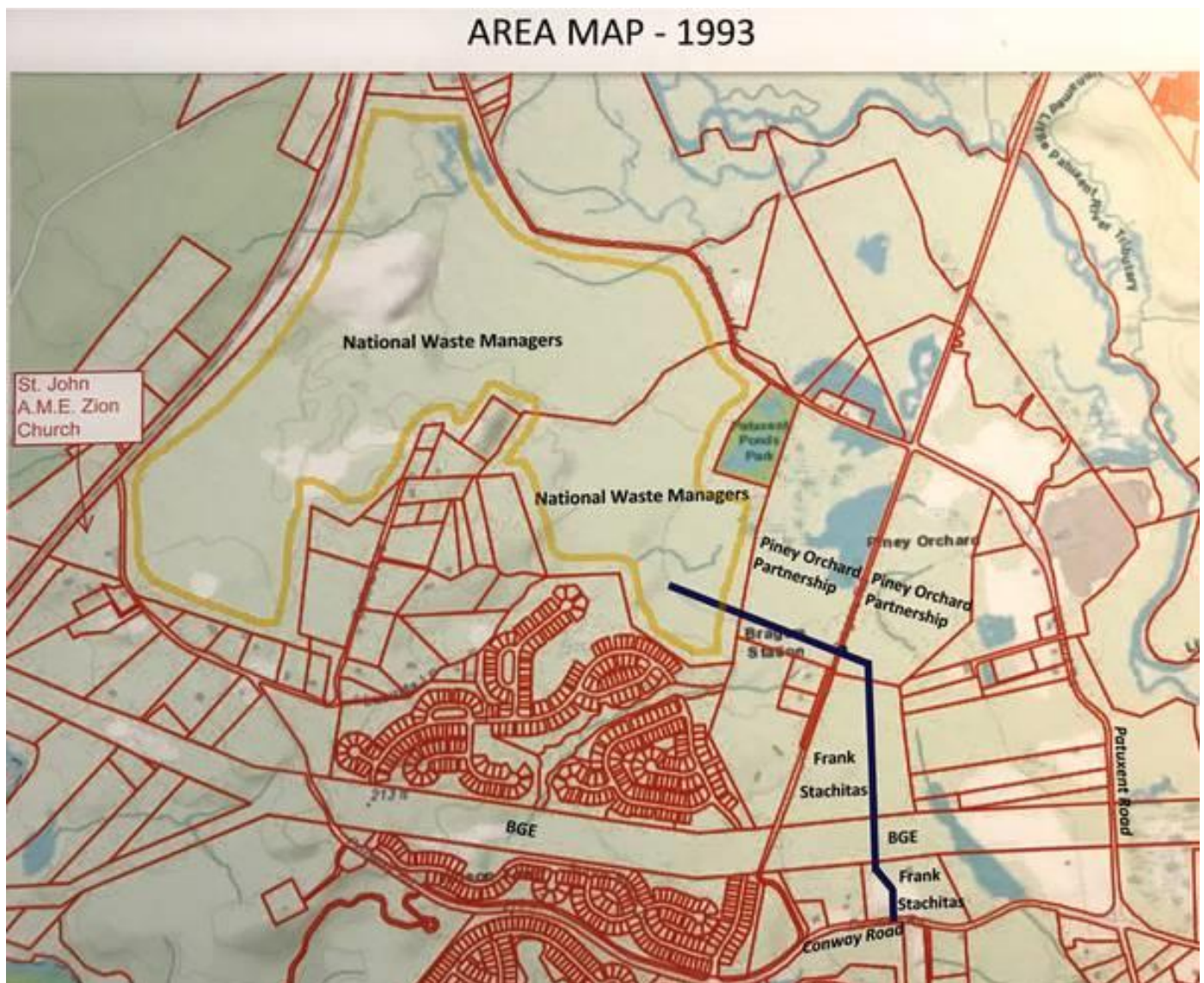
In mid-June, the Maryland Department of the Environment notified National Waste Managers it would need to receive approval from the Army Corps of Engineers once more as the first time the project was approved by the corps the bat was not officially on the endangered species list yet.

The northern long-eared bat was [officially listed as endangered](#) March 31 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The creatures are only about three to four inches long and tend to [spend winters in caves and warmer months in forests](#), according to the service. The bats were listed as an endangered species due to the pervasive fungal infection known as [white-nose syndrome](#) that covers the muzzle and wings in fungus and leads to dehydration and starvation. Between the mid 1990s and late 2010s the disease has killed more than 90% of northern long-eared, little brown and tri-colored bats, according to the Department of the Interior.

National Waste Managers now must have an endangered species consultation performed and signed off on by the corps as required by the Endangered Species Act, according to the state's letter to the developer.

Until the consultation is complete, the state cannot proceed with the permit application, said Department of the Environment spokesperson Jay Apperson, adding there is no set timeline by when the developer must respond.



Odenton and Crofton area residents have been fighting the proposed landfill project for more than 30 years. (Courtesy Photo)

This is the latest development in a battle that's been brewing since 1988 between the landfill developers and the residents of the area, many of whom are passionately opposed to the project. Among other types of rubble, the developers would be authorized to store asbestos which [many fear could impact their drinking water](#). The area's water quality is already threatened by a plume of contaminants including toxic PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals" coming from a landfill at Fort Meade that is headed for the county's Crofton Meadows water treatment plant.

The area's County Council representative, Julie Hummer, said the community is doing all it can to stop National Waste Managers' landfill project, but the developers have proved persistent.

"We're trying everything we have but I'm not hanging all my hopes on the bat," Hummer said. "There's just been so many ups and downs with this."

Representatives from National Waste Managers declined to comment for this story, but history has proved their strong desire to make this project happen.

During the 2022 Anne Arundel County executive race, numerous people affiliated with the company donated to Republican Jessica Haire's campaign against incumbent Democrat Steuart Pittman, who had already publicly expressed his opposition to the project.

A coalition of community groups [requested Haire return](#) what they estimated to be around \$250,000 in donations from those associated with the developer. Haire would go on to lose to Pittman in November.

"It would be nice if MDE had a legal reason to say, 'Sorry you can't have this landfill because you can't meet these state requirements,'" said Ed Riehl an Odenton resident, who serves as chairman of Two Rivers Residents-Landfill Opposition Committee.



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed listing tricolored bats as endangered. (Pete Pattavina/U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service/TNS)

While Hummer and Riehl are unsure if the bats will sink the project, Hummer said she is hopeful about the fact that the refuge, and by extension the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of the Interior, are now in this fight because it could trigger other environmental threats that could come from a landfill so close by.

Another bat species, the tricolored bat, which has also been potentially detected nearby with acoustic data, may also soon become endangered, according to Greiner, which could delay things further.

"Wouldn't that be something if we're saved by the bats?" Hummer said.