

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MECKLENBURG

IN THE OFFICE OF
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
19 EHR 02399

DUKE ENERGY CAROLINAS, LLC,)
)
Petitioner,)
)
v.)
)
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA *ex rel.*)
NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF)
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY,)
)
Respondent.)
_____)

MOTION TO INTERVENE

N.C.G.S. § 1A-1, Rule 24
N.C.G.S. § 150B-23
26 N.C.A.C. 3.0117

MountainTrue, pursuant to Rule 24 of the North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure, N.C.G.S. § 150B-23(d), and 26 N.C.A.C. 3.0117, hereby moves this Court for leave to intervene in the above-captioned matter as Respondent-Intervenor. MountainTrue files this motion after conferring with counsel for Petitioner and Respondent. Respondent consents to MountainTrue’s intervention as a full party. Petitioner indicated that it would state its position in its response to this motion.

In support of this motion, MountainTrue shows the Court the following:

FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

1. MountainTrue seeks to intervene in this action to participate fully as a party to the challenge filed by Duke Energy Carolinas, LLC (“Petitioner” or “Duke Energy”) to the Coal Combustion Residuals Surface Impoundment Closure Determination (the “Closure Determination(s)”), announced by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (“DEQ”) on April 1, 2019 for the Rogers Energy Complex (formerly known as Cliffside Steam Station) (“Rogers/Cliffside”) coal ash site in Cleveland and Rutherford counties, NC. The

Closure Determination requires Duke Energy to submit closure plans to excavate all the coal ash it stores in unlined, leaking pits at its Rogers/Cliffside site. *See* North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, *DEQ Orders All Coal Ash Excavated*, <https://deq.nc.gov/news/key-issues/deq-orders-all-coal-ash-excavated> (last accessed May 3, 2019).

2. Duke Energy owns and operates 14 coal ash sites across North Carolina. By orders of the N.C. Superior Court, Duke Energy's criminal plea agreement with the United States, and a Clean Water Act settlement agreement with separate environmental nonprofit organizations, Duke Energy is already required to fully excavate the coal ash from its unlined lagoons at eight of its North Carolina sites. Excavation of several ash basins is complete already, and is underway at many of these sites.

3. The remaining six sites are those at issue in the contested cases before OAH. At these six sites, Duke Energy stores over 79 million tons of coal ash in leaking, unlined pits. At every one of these sites, the coal ash is saturated deep beneath the groundwater within the impoundments, where it is leaching and will continue to leach pollutants into nearby groundwater and surface waters outside the ash basins. Contaminated wastewater also leaks through their earthen dams into nearby waterways. As a result, the coal ash in these pits has contaminated groundwater and streams, lakes, rivers, and drinking water reservoirs for decades with pollutants including arsenic, lead, mercury, and selenium. Duke Energy documents show that coal ash will remain saturated in groundwater if these pits are covered with a synthetic cap under Duke Energy's preferred "cap-in-place" or "hybrid" closure methods, and will continue to leach pollutants into the surrounding waters for centuries to come.

4. In 2013, DEQ (then called DENR) filed enforcement actions in Superior Court regarding Duke Energy's unlawful groundwater pollution and leaks of wastewater from its coal

ash pits. *State of North Carolina ex rel. N.C. DENR v. Duke Energy Carolinas, LLC*, 13 CVS 9352 & 13 CVS 14661 (Mecklenburg Co.); *State of North Carolina ex rel. N.C. DENR v. Duke Energy Progress, Inc.*, 13 CVS 4061 & 13 CVS 11032 (Wake Co.). Local conservation groups including MountainTrue’s predecessor, Western North Carolina Alliance (“the Community Groups”) moved to intervene in that action as Plaintiff-Intervenors, and the Superior Court granted all of those motions. These Community Groups have been participating as full parties in the state litigation concerning the coal ash sites at issue in these contested cases.

5. Under the Coal Ash Management Act, N.C. Gen. Stat. § 130A-309.200 *et seq.*, “[a]t the election of the Department” of Environmental Quality, Duke Energy must close the ponds at these six sites in one of three ways: (1) by removing all the ash from the pits and moving it to a lined landfill or recycling it for concrete, (2) by leaving the ash in place with a cap over it, or (3) in compliance with the federal coal combustion residuals rule. *Id.* § 130A-309.214(a)(3). Consistent with DEQ’s election of closure method, Duke Energy must submit coal ash impoundment closure plans for these six sites to DEQ for the agency’s approval. *Id.* The General Assembly recognized in CAMA that excavation of coal ash is the most effective way to close failing unlined coal ash impoundments and subjected cap-in-place closure to restrictive limitations. *Id.* §§ 130A-309.213(d)(1); 130A-309.214(a)(3)b, (c).

6. DEQ stated the schedule for evaluating closure options for each site in correspondence with Duke Energy in the fall of 2018. Under that schedule, Duke Energy would submit closure options reports and other materials for each site to DEQ by November 15, 2018. DEQ hosted a series of public meetings in communities near each of the coal ash sites during January 2019. And DEQ accepted written comments from the public through February 15, 2019. MountainTrue participated in the public meetings and submitted written comments, including

additional comments submitted after February 15 in response to late submissions by Duke Energy to the agency. As it had informed Duke Energy it would do, DEQ completed its evaluation of the closure options by April 1, 2019.

7. On April 1, 2019, DEQ announced its Closure Determinations, requiring Duke Energy to submit closure plans by August 1, 2019, to excavate the coal ash from its unlined lagoons at these six sites. On April 26, Duke Energy filed petitions for a Contested Case Hearing to dispute the Closure Determinations.

The Respondent-Intervenor

8. MountainTrue seeks to intervene and participate with the full rights of a party as to the Rogers/Cliffside site.

9. MountainTrue is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to champion resilient forests, clean waters and healthy communities in Western North Carolina. Formed in January 2015 when Western North Carolina Alliance merged with two other conservation groups, MountainTrue focuses on a core set of issues across 23 counties of Western North Carolina: sensible land use, restoring public forests, protecting water quality and promoting clean energy. MountainTrue is headquartered in Asheville, North Carolina and also has offices in Boone and Hendersonville, North Carolina.

10. MountainTrue and its members have been harmed by Duke Energy's coal ash pollution at the Rogers/Cliffside site. Members of MountainTrue live near and use the waters in the vicinity of Duke Energy's leaking, unlined coal ash pits. These members fear damage to the waterways, wildlife, and the natural environment they use and enjoy, as well as contamination of groundwater that flows into streams, lakes, and rivers, as a result of the ongoing and potential future leaks of pollution from Duke Energy's unlined coal ash lagoons, which contain toxic

pollutants including arsenic, mercury, and many other harmful contaminants. Many members are also concerned by the impact these discharges and the possibility of a catastrophic spill.

11. For years, MountainTrue and its members have been actively engaged in public hearings, meetings, and forums to urge state leaders and Duke Energy to take appropriate action to halt the ongoing, unlawful coal ash pollution at Rogers/Cliffside. The Community Groups and their members, including MountainTrue and its members, have submitted written comments and participated in public meetings and hearings hosted by DEQ as part of the CAMA process since the law was enacted in 2014. Members of the Community Groups have also addressed the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the NC DEQ Secretary's Environmental Justice and Equity Board about the importance of cleaning up these coal ash sites.

12. Copies of affidavits demonstrating the interests of MountainTrue and its members are attached as Exhibit 1.

ARGUMENT

13. With this motion, MountainTrue seeks to intervene in this contested case to ensure the unsafe, polluting storage of coal ash in Duke Energy's unlined, leaking coal ash lagoons is fully removed, just as is being done at Duke Energy's eight other coal ash sites in North Carolina already.

14. Under the North Carolina Administrative Procedure Act ("APA"), citizens can intervene in contested cases. Rule 24 of the North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure authorizes intervention as of right upon "timely application" when the applicant "claims an interest relating to the . . . transaction which is the subject of the action and he is so situated that the disposition of the action may as a practical matter impair or impede his ability to protect that interest, unless the applicant's interest is adequately represented by existing parties." N.C. R. Civ. P. 24(a)(2);

see also 26 N.C.A.C. 3.0117. Section 150B-23(d) of the APA provides that “any person may petition to become a party by filing a motion to intervene in the manner provided in G.S. 1A-1, Rule 24.” N.C. Gen. Stat. §150B-23(d). As explained below, MountainTrue meets all these requirements and is entitled to intervene in this proceeding as a full party.

MountainTrue Is Entitled to Intervention With All Rights of a Party.

15. MountainTrue may intervene as a full party because it has a longstanding interest, already recognized by the Superior Court, in protecting the waters in its communities from Duke Energy’s unsafe and polluting coal ash lagoons. The coal ash Duke Energy stores in these leaking, unlined pits is contaminating the surface waters and groundwater MountainTrue and its members depend on and work to protect.

16. The Community Groups and their members, including MountainTrue and its members, have worked for years to clean up Duke Energy’s coal ash lagoons. In 2013, several of the Community Groups sent Clean Water Act notices of intent to file citizen enforcement actions against Duke Energy for unlawful pollution at multiple coal ash sites in North Carolina; in response, DEQ filed state actions against Duke Energy. In those state actions, the North Carolina Superior Court recognized that these groups were entitled to intervention with the full rights of parties to protect their interests in protecting their communities and waterways from Duke Energy’s leaking coal ash lagoons. The Superior Court permitted individual Community Groups to intervene in the State’s coal ash enforcement cases against Duke Energy as to the sites they represent. *See* Exhibit 2, Orders Granting Motions to Intervene (Nov. 18, 2013, Aug. 9, 2013, May 3, 2014), *State of North Carolina ex rel. N.C. DENR v. Duke Energy Carolinas, LLC*, 13 CVS 9352 & 13 CVS 14661 (Mecklenburg Co.); *State of North Carolina ex rel. N.C. DENR v. Duke Energy Progress, Inc.*, 13 CVS 4061 & 13 CVS 11032 (Wake Co.). Thus,

MountainTrue's right to participate as a full party in litigation concerning these coal ash sites and their long-term fate has been recognized already by the Superior Court.

17. MountainTrue has a direct and substantial interest in participating in these proceedings to protect the waters surrounding the Rogers/Cliffside site by ensuring that Duke Energy removes its ash from the unlined ash basins, where it is sitting in the groundwater and leaking pollutants into groundwater and surface waters. MountainTrue therefore has an interest in the status of DEQ's Closure Determinations, which require that Duke Energy prepare closure plans to excavate the ash. Whether these excavation Closure Determinations are upheld will directly affect the ability of MountainTrue's members to protect and enjoy the waters in their communities. 26 N.C.A.C. 3.0117(a). MountainTrue has advocated for cleanups of these sites in comment periods and public meetings under the N.C. Coal Ash Management Act since it was enacted in 2014. Most recently, MountainTrue participated in the series of CAMA public meetings DEQ held in each of the communities around the six coal ash sites at issue in these challenges. Members of the Community Groups, including members of MountainTrue, attended and made oral and written comments, and the Community Groups themselves submitted extensive written comments and expert analyses of the shortcomings of Duke Energy's submissions to the State. *See, e.g.*, Exhibit 3, Comment Letter from MountainTrue and other Community Groups to DEQ (Feb. 15, 2019). These groups also submitted comments to the North Carolina Environmental Justice Advisory Board; the board subsequently urged DEQ to require excavation at all six sites to protect the communities nearby.

18. Resolving these challenges without MountainTrue's participation would impair its ability to protect its interests in protecting its communities and waterways from these coal ash sites. Duke Energy has filed these challenges to attempt to undermine DEQ's decision and gain

approval for less-protective cap-in-place or hybrid closure methods at these sites. These options would leave all the coal ash within the unlined ash basins and saturated in groundwater rather than removing it to dry, lined landfill storage or recycling—threatening MountainTrue’s members’ interests in clean water for decades to come.

19. Without intervention, these contested cases would also impair MountainTrue’s longstanding rights and interests in the progress and outcome of the ongoing state litigation in which it is a party. The Superior Court has stated that it will take account of the CAMA administrative process in resolving the state enforcement actions; on April 29, the Court stated that it would revisit the issue in an early August status conference. Thus, the duration and outcome of Duke Energy’s challenges to DEQ’s closure determinations may affect MountainTrue’s rights and interests in the course of the currently-pending state enforcement actions in which MountainTrue is a party.

20. Moreover, a prior OAH proceeding by Duke Energy without the participation of MountainTrue and the other Community Groups has already impaired their interests, and illustrates the harms that result from excluding the Community Groups from coal ash dispute resolution. In 2015, Duke Energy attempted to transform a challenge to a penalty at a single coal ash site, which Duke Energy filed in OAH, into a global settlement that purported to settle all the groundwater claims pending in the separate Superior Court enforcement actions covering all of Duke Energy’s North Carolina coal ash sites, including the six sites at issue here. To protect their interests, the Community Groups were forced to seek Superior Court review of the OAH order approving that overbroad settlement. Only as a result of the Community Groups’ involvement, the OAH order was subsequently modified to confine it to the proper scope of the penalty challenge. Accordingly, MountainTrue and the other Community Groups must be

allowed to participate in the current Duke Energy challenges and any potential mediation or settlement efforts to ensure that any resolution of these challenges does not harm these groups or their members' interests.

21. In addition to MountainTrue's unique interests in protecting these coal ash sites, MountainTrue will provide valuable information. MountainTrue's experts have evaluated the hydrology and geochemistry of these coal ash sites and can present important information to OAH about Duke Energy's coal ash pollution and about the computer modeling Duke Energy has prepared in an attempt to justify the less-protective cap-in-place and hybrid closure methods. MountainTrue submitted the conclusions of those experts to DEQ, and they are part of the administrative record of DEQ's decision. By participating as an intervenor, MountainTrue can present and explain those important issues.

22. MountainTrue and the other Community Groups also may play a useful role in resolving claims and reaching agreement where possible. In the state enforcement actions, Community Group intervenors and Duke Energy worked together to develop a framework for resolving claims at seven of the 14 coal ash sites at issue. Under the partial summary judgment orders that the Superior Court entered as a result (in some cases over the objection of DEQ), Duke Energy is required to excavate the ash from those seven sites. In these proceedings, allowing MountainTrue and the other Community Groups to intervene as parties will allow them to protect their interests in resolving claims through any potential settlement.

23. Respondent DEQ does not adequately represent MountainTrue's interests in this matter and has consented to MountainTrue's intervention. As an agency of the State, DEQ represents a different and much less focused set of interests than MountainTrue, including those of Duke Energy (a state-regulated utility), and has wide-ranging responsibilities, including

issuing permits to industrial applicants, such as the environmental permits for Duke Energy's facilities. MountainTrue, however, represent its members, who live and own property near and downstream from Duke Energy's unlined, leaking coal ash lagoons and who use the adjacent river and streams. MountainTrue is focused on protecting specific communities and waters from pollution.

24. Moreover, while DEQ has now determined that excavation is required at the Rogers/Cliffside coal ash site, as MountainTrue has long advocated, in the past DEQ has acted in direct opposition to the Community Groups regarding coal ash. For years, DEQ failed to enforce water pollution and dam safety laws at these coal ash sites, despite clear documentation of leaks in the earthen dams and increasing contamination of groundwater and surface water; DEQ subsequently filed state court actions in 2013 to attempt to block Clean Water Act citizen suits in response to notice letters sent by some of the Community Groups; DEQ proposed a settlement of several of these enforcement cases that would have imposed only a token fine and more study, a proposal it was forced to withdraw after the Dan River coal ash spill and the announcement of a federal grand jury investigation into Duke Energy's coal ash practices; DEQ attempted to stay and dismiss its own state enforcement actions multiple times; DEQ entered into the 2015 OAH settlement that purported to eliminate pending groundwater claims from the state enforcement actions; and DEQ opposed Superior Court orders requiring coal ash cleanups at other sites in North Carolina. Thus, DEQ's interests regarding these coal ash sites are not directly aligned with MountainTrue, and all parties would benefit from MountainTrue's participation.

25. In sum, to advance MountainTrue's interests in protecting the rivers, streams, and groundwater its members use and rely on, and in ensuring that Duke Energy excavates the coal

ash at these sites in order to eliminate the long-term risks posed by its unlined, leaking lagoons, MountainTrue must be allowed to intervene as a full party in this action.

26. For these reasons, MountainTrue is entitled to intervene in this proceeding as of right pursuant to Rule 24(a)(2) of the North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure and as a party pursuant to 26 N.C.A.C. 3.0117(d)(2).

27. In the alternative, MountainTrue also is entitled to permissive intervention pursuant to Rule 24(b)(2) of the North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure and Section 150B-23(d) of the North Carolina Administrative Procedure Act. A moving party seeking to intervene under Rule 24(b)(2) shall be permitted to intervene in an action “when an applicant’s claim or defense and the main action have a question of law or fact in common.” N.C. Gen. Stat. § 1A-1, Rule 24(b)(2). MountainTrue is a party to currently-pending state litigation concerning Duke Energy’s coal ash pollution of groundwater and surface waters at Rogers/Cliffside, and is seeking removal of the ash from Duke Energy’s lagoons in that proceeding in order to stop the ongoing, unlawful pollution. The issues in this proceeding, which impact MountainTrue’s abilities to fulfill its mission to protect the people and the water in its communities, involve common questions of law and fact. For example, the CAMA reports and data collected by Duke Energy and submitted to DEQ form the primary basis for the expert reports and testimony by all parties in the state enforcement actions in which MountainTrue is participating as a party. And the state actions in which MountainTrue is an intervenor are enforcing the state’s 2L groundwater rules, which are also at issue in these CAMA contested cases.

28. Respondent DEQ consents to the relief requested under Rule 24(b). Petitioner Duke Energy has not yet taken a position on this motion. However, on April 29, Duke Energy urged the Superior Court not to proceed with the pending enforcement actions, arguing that the

public has a right to be involved in these OAH challenges first. Moreover, in the state enforcement actions, after unsuccessfully opposing intervention by several of the Community Groups, Duke Energy eventually stipulated to intervention by one of the Community Groups as to the Mayo and Roxboro coal ash sites. Exhibit 4, Stipulation Regarding Roanoke River Basin Association's Motion to Intervene, *State of North Carolina ex rel. N.C. DENR v. Duke Energy Progress, Inc.*, 13 CVS 11032 (Wake Co., Oct. 17, 2014). Subsequently, Duke Energy joined with the Community Groups in moving for partial summary judgment to enter binding cleanup orders for seven of its coal ash sites in North Carolina. Thus, Duke Energy cannot credibly argue that MountainTrue should not participate fully in these cases.

The Motion to Intervene is Timely.

29. MountainTrue's Motion to Intervene satisfies the timeliness requirement of Rule 24. MountainTrue's Motion to Intervene likewise satisfies the timeliness requirement of 26 NCAC 03 .0117, which states that "Timeliness will be determined by the administrative law judge in each case based on circumstances at the time of filing."

30. To determine whether a motion to intervene is timely, the court looks to "(1) the status of the case, (2) the possibility of unfairness or prejudice to the existing parties, (3) the reason for the delay in moving for intervention, (4) the resulting prejudice to the applicant if the motion is denied, and (5) any unusual circumstances." *Hamilton v. Freeman*, 147 N.C. App. 195, 201, 554 S.E.2d 856, 859 (2001) (quoting *Procter v. City of Raleigh Bd. of Adjust.*, 133 N.C. App. 181, 183, 514 S.E.2d 745, 746 (1999)). In practice, "a motion to intervene is rarely denied as untimely prior to the entry of judgment." *Taylor v. Abernathy*, 149 N.C. App. 263, 267-68, 560 S.E.2d 233, 236 (2002) (quoting *Hamilton v. Freeman*, 147 N.C. App. 195, 201, 554 S.E.2d 856, 859-60 (2001)).

31. MountainTrue's Motion to Intervene is timely. MountainTrue moved to intervene within one week after Duke Energy filed its contested case petition on April 26, 2019. Upon information and belief, prehearing statements have not been filed, no discovery has been conducted by Petitioner or Respondent, and mediation has not been conducted. No hearing on the merits has taken place, let alone any entry of judgment.

32. Because MountainTrue has moved to intervene as early as possible in this matter, before discovery or motions practice has gotten underway, the proposed intervention will not unduly delay this litigation, nor will it unduly delay or prejudice the adjudication of the rights of the existing parties.

33. Finally, MountainTrue will be prejudiced if this motion is denied because, as detailed above, it will be unable to protect its and its members' interests in ensuring these ash ponds are closed safely. MountainTrue needs to participate now to protect its interests in securing a speedy resolution to this challenge and ensuring these cleanups in its members' communities move forward properly and as promptly as possible.

34. Furthermore, MountainTrue needs to participate in these proceedings to prevent prejudice to its pending state litigation.

35. Accordingly, for the reasons set forth above, this motion to intervene is timely.

Conclusion

36. For the reasons given above, MountainTrue requests that the Court grant its Motion to Intervene as respondent-intervenor with all the rights of a party in this matter.

37. MountainTrue has not attached a responsive pleading as the OAH Rules do not require responsive pleadings to accompany a Motion to Intervene. *See* 26 N.C.A.C. 3.0117. Following receipt of an Order allowing the Motion to Intervene, MountainTrue will file a

Prehearing Statement according to the schedule set by the Court. MountainTrue respectfully submits a Proposed Order granting intervention, which is attached hereto as Exhibit 5.

This 3rd day of May, 2019.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned certifies that, on the date shown below, the foregoing Motion to Intervene was sent to the persons named below at the addresses shown below, by electronic service as defined in 26 NCAC 03 .0501(4), or by placing a copy thereof, enclosed in a wrapper addressed to the person to be served, into an official depository of the United States Postal Service:

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This 3rd day May, 2019.

/s Nicholas S. Torrey