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4/17/14  
Bonnie  
Smith

Dear City Commissioners,

I have recently learned something that scares me immensely and I need your help. My name is Yvette Smith and I am a member of Alachua County and of Gainesville. I want to bring to your attention something that is important to me, and I think, to many others in our community. I want to bring your attention to a problem that I feel, has a simple enough solution. The problem I am speaking of is Mountain Top Removal coal mining, and GRU's participation in this process. Mountain Top Removal is a way of obtaining coal by obliterating the tops of mountains in one of our countries most beloved mountain ranges, and not to mention, the most biodiverse range in our country; The Appalachian Mountains. What scares me is that GRU, the main power plant of our area, happens to get their coal supply from a company that uses MTR to mine for coal. I am not writing to you in an attempt to completely stop Mountain Top Removal, because that would be too much for me to ask. All that I request is that GRU stops buying coal from these companies, and that you help stop Gainesville's affiliation with this distasteful and dangerous method of mining. Mountain Top Removal is an operation that has many detrimental affects on peoples lives, destructive disturbances on our environment, and should lose Gainesville's support once and for all.

Gainesville's connection to Mountain Top Removal needs to finally be severed. Mountain Top Removal is something that not many people know about, and if they do, they are either people who think it is something only 'hippies' care about, or they are the 'hippies' that feel passionate about it. The thing is, Mountain Top Removal is not just a small problem that only crazy, environmentally aware people should care about. It is the monster under our bed that is destroying mountains, and the lives of many people in those

areas. People just like us, with families and dreams and passions. Its many consequences hang over us like an unknown shadow. GRU is a well-respected company, and yet they refuse to listen to the voices that have spoken out against their use of Mountain Top Removal coal. What is stopping them from buying from a different company? How can they not realize and accept the negative effects this has on so many people, and the environment? Coal causes 13,000 premature deaths per year and costs \$100 million, annually, for health problems (Beyond Coal)! Additionally, it has been presaged that 1.4 million acres of Appalachian forests will be destroyed by the end of the decade if MTR continues at this rate (iLoveMountains). Are those not good enough reasons for GRU to switch? The trouble that GRU would have to go through to buy from a different coal company is well worth the end of our affiliation with this haunting and scary practice. I hope that you listen to what I say with seriousness because I am writing to you with hope in my heart.

The effects MTR has on people's lives, culture, and homes are extremely ~~damaging. When companies are mining for coal using MTR, they use dynamite to blast~~ off large sections of mountains to get to very small seams of coal. Because dynamite is less expensive than people, many people's jobs have been confiscated, and they are no longer able to support their families (Mountain Justice). When these companies blast mountains at any hour of the night or day, the walls and wells of people's homes crack, and it ruins the foundations of their houses and their water sources. (iLoveMountains). The companies do not take any responsibility for these problems. They call them, "Acts of God". The waste from the coalmines is called slurry. Slurry is a thick sludge that is full of heavy metals and carcinogenic chemicals that are carelessly stored at the heads of

large rivers in dams. They are extremely dangerous and frequently spill. When these impoundments spill, all of those chemicals and metals leak into people's water sources, contaminating their water and endangering their lives (Mountain Justice). This is not a minuscule issue! These are people whose health, safety, and privacy are being invaded upon and put at risk, and no matter what they do; they cannot stop Mountain Top Removal! Their backyards, the land that they were raised on and hoped to raise their children on, is being demolished, blown to bits, destroyed, and you want Gainesville to play apart in this? You want us to continue to shake hands with the very beast that terrifies and daunts so many people? Keeping them up at night with a looming sense of horror hanging over their heads? That is what GRU is supporting by purchasing coal from Mountain Top Removal companies. Just step in their shoes for a moment. Their homes are damaged, their tap water is brown and full of toxic chemicals, their culture and privacy are being destroyed, they have a fresh layer of coal dust on their counters every day, and their children's' health is at risk. Alachua County, being as conscious as it is, should not be taking a part in this. In fact, we should be making an even bigger effort to stop MTR. The companies that control this mining technique are careless and insensitive. In 1972, a coal company was warned by inspection workers that their slurry dam was in a dangerous place and could easily spill over. They ignored this warning and one day it overflowed, flooding the valley and killing over one hundred people. Many more were injured and thousands were homeless (Mountain Justice). The company did not take responsibility for this tragedy and continued mining. To me, that is inhumane, and if you think that this is acceptable and should be supported; then you should think twice.

Unfortunately, the damage does not stop there. Mountain Top Removal has just as horrific consequences on the environment. The Appalachian Mountains have more biodiversity than any other area in our country, and Mountain Top Removal is ruining that. I have been visiting The Appalachian's since I was a young child. It is one of my favorite places to go hiking and camping and to simple enjoy. The fact that those beautiful forests that I have been exploring my whole life are diminishing kills me. It makes me cringe to think of all the pollution contaminating one of the places I adore. The coalminers act as though they have found a treasure with this coal, but it is not as good as it seems. The coal basins in these mountains may only last for the next one or two decades! It is not worth the amounts of demolished forests and decimated mountains to get to that meager amount of coal. These objectives may be faulty, but the ramifications are worse. The rivers near the plants are constantly being contaminated with heavy metals and deadly chemicals; killing off animals and carrying the poisons to other areas. The Mountain Top Removal companies are supposed to restore the mountains to their original state and then give them back to the previous owners once they've been striped of their coal. These monsters deceive us and leave with broken promises and vandalized landscapes. They make a miniscule attempt to grow some vegetation on the small knolls that are left over, but the land is so polluted and ravaged that it never returns to its original health. Because of the miners' lack in effort and application in the restoration of the mountains, these habitats will never again be biodiverse and thriving ecosystems (NRDC). Their ideals and attempts are filled with ignorance, and they are so wrong in what they are doing. I am asking you to realize this too. I am asking you to halt our participation in Mountain Top Removal and see that they are mistaken. See that what

they are doing is beastly and shameful. That it is painless enough for GRU to stop their alliance with these monsters.

Mountain Top Removal coal mining is an unfavorable practice that is destroying the ecosystems of our most biodiverse area; stomping on the lives of innocent and compassionate people, and our affiliation with this process must stop. You are the arbiter in this situation, and I am asking you, with a heart full of hope and ambition, to help Alachua County become MTR free. To help me make our community, of which I care for very much, a better and more improved place.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yvette Smith