Katie Maxwell  
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My name is Katie Maxwell. I am the Communications Coordinator for Faith in Place, an interfaith environmental justice nonprofit, and am from the Chicago area. I am also a person of faith, and my Lutheran tradition calls me to seek justice in the world. This is a moment to do just that.

I am speaking today because I believe in people over profits, and I believe coal plant companies need to take full responsibility for cleaning up their messes. From Waukegan to the Middle Fork River, IL’s only National Scenic River, I have seen the harmful effects of coal ash first hand. Several years ago, I chaperoned a group of Lake County Youth Eco-Ambassadors—all of whom had grown up within miles of the Waukegan Generating Station (which has coal ash fill that should be covered by the final rule)—on a canoe trip down the river.

Andrew Rehn of Prairie Rivers Network guided us down the river on a bright, sunny day. He showed us how close by the shuttered Vermillion Power Station is, and pointed out the orange, toxic coal ash seeping into the river in bright streaks along the riverbank. These seeps come from unlined coal ash ponds that threaten the integrity of the eroding shoreline. If that riverbank were to collapse, it would be devastating for the river and for surrounding communities. We shouldn’t need what Prairie Rivers calls “the risk of a catastrophic breach” to do something about these improperly stored carcinogens. They’re already in the groundwater.

We need the final Coal Ash rules to be stronger than this draft so that polluters are held responsible and people are protected. We cannot lose our State’s only National Scenic River. And environmental justice communities like Waukegan need extra protections, such as dust protection and safe transportation during impoundment removal and greater language accessibility to all materials and meetings.

Thank you for your time and for listening to my testimony.