

Fire the ADEM toad, but watch out for snakes

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Alabama Department of Environmental Management director Lance LeFleur delivers a report to the Alabama Environmental Management Commission on Friday, Dec. 18, 2015 at ADEM's main office in Montgomery. The Commission voted 6-0 with one abstention to approve a 20 percent increase in permit fees charged by the department due to decreased state funding. (Dennis Pillion | dpillion@al.com) ((*Dennis Pillion* | dpillion@al.co)

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This is an opinion column.

I feel ya, guys. I feel ya.

You want to snatch a knot in somebody. You want to hold someone responsible for turning a blind eye toward toxic north Birmingham. You want to punish someone for cowering like a whipped dog before corporate and government masters, for refusing to carry out his duty to the people of Alabama - even though he knew he should - because he was frightened.

I get it.

It would be satisfying to hold Alabama Department of Environmental Management Director Lance LeFleur liable for his feckless abdication of responsibility, as 11 different environmental groups have demanded. The guy - it was [clear from the trial](#)

[of a powerful lawyer and Drummond Co. exec this month](#) - could see the conflict that comes when lawyers for polluters dictate environmental policy.

But, rebuked by Gov. Robert Bentley and lawyers who sent a message that big business would look on him with disfavor if he refused to carry their dirty water, he chose to ...

See no evil. Hear no evil.

Speak only evils on behalf of those who let residents in north Birmingham live in a pile of heavy metal, who sought to scare them into refusing to have their soil tested, much less cleaned.

I see the appeal in sending LeFleur packing.

As those groups [said in a letter this week](#), LeFleur "failed to lead the Department in a manner that advances its official mission "to assure for all citizens of the State a safe, healthful and productive environment."

Yep. LeFleur is a toad in this swamp, a little amphibian trying to cling to his lily pad. Shine the light in his eyes and he'll freeze solid. But he's not the real danger in this place.

Things are lurking here, people.

The guy LeFleur replaced, Trey Glenn, was up to his earholes in the north Birmingham fiasco, as testimony revealed. He was so in the pocket of big business, so indifferent to pollution that Donald Trump appointed him director of the EPA for the whole Southeast.

And even though a jury found Balch & Bingham lawyer Joel Gilbert and Drummond VP David Roberson guilty of bribing a lawmaker to help thwart cleanup of north Birmingham, the food chain in this bog is still clear.

Drummond Co. has given more than \$1.7 million to in-state politicians and PACs in recent elections, including \$230,000 to the three sitting public service commissioners - and to PACs that gave those commissioners another \$166,000. That's how the public gets serviced in Alabama.



Dirty Business: How Alabama conspired against its own people

Political elites worked with polluters to leave poisons in the soil of some of Birmingham's most vulnerable neighborhoods.

It gave more than \$90,000 to former Attorney General Luther Strange, who did Drummond's bidding like a trained seal. It gave heavily to PACs that gave to current AG Steve Marshall and Gov. Kay Ivey, and gave \$35,000 to Del Marsh, the head of the senate who was a character witness for Drummond exec Roberson in the trial,

explaining how he knew Roberson from way back, from fighting together for the rights of polluters.

Marsh has a future as a character witness for criminals if the whole leadership thing goes south. He was a character witness the trial of former House Speaker Mike Hubbard, too, and said he can't imagine his friends breaking the law. Now he wants Alabama's ethics law rewritten, because his view of right and wrong is based more on his pals than his scruples.

I know getting rid of the toad LeFleur would be a start in cleaning this place up. But that's all it is.

Alas, a swamp is not treacherous because of the toads. It's the snakes you have to watch for.

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Eleven Conservation Organizations Call for ADEM Director's Resignation or Termination

Black Warrior Riverkeeper Demands New Leadership in Lance LeFleur's Annual Job Evaluation

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – The bribery and corruption trial *U.S. v. Gilbert, et al* yielded many disturbing revelations, including the failures of leaders at the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and the Alabama Environmental Management Commission (AEMC) to avoid conflicts of interest with those whom they regulate.

There and in many other instances, ADEM Director Lance LeFleur has failed to lead the Department in a manner that advances its official mission “to assure for all citizens of the State a safe, healthful and productive environment.”

Coincidentally, LeFleur’s annual job evaluation and public comments are due today, July 30.

This morning, Black Warrior Riverkeeper emailed its evaluation of Director LeFleur to the Personnel Committee of the AEMC, which oversees ADEM. [The letter calls for LeFleur's resignation or termination](#) due to his consistent failure to lead and advance ADEM’s mission.

Groups signing Black Warrior Riverkeeper’s letter include Alabama Rivers Alliance, Cahaba River Society, Cahaba Riverkeeper, Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper, Environmental Defense Alliance, Friends of Hurricane Creek, Friends of the Locust Fork River, Gasp, Little River Waterkeeper, and Tennessee Riverkeeper.

For a copy of the letter, [click here](#).

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