



THE LEAGUE LINE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE



REMEMBERING BREDL LEADER SAM TESH

On October 5, long-time BREDL Co-President Sam Tesh passed away, after several years of declining health. In this issue, we look back at Sam's more than three decades of service to BREDL, including his work on two successful campaigns with two different BREDL chapters. (Page 4)

NCDEQ RESPONDS TO SCHOOL PFAS CONTAMINATION

In June 2024, wells which supplied Farmer Elementary School in Randolph County, NC were found to be contaminated with PFAS. After several months of testing, NCDEQ believes they have discovered the contamination source. (Page 3)



For more information on this story and others, visit our website!

<https://www.bredl.org>



Source: Pixabay

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OFF-GRID LIVING ON THE RISE AMID CLIMATE CHANGE

BY: KATHY ANDREWS, BREDL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Off-grid living is on the rise. According to the US Census Bureau's 2024 data, 1.5 million American households are fully off-grid. One of the major reasons is climate anxiety. Across the country, we've seen more tornadoes, flooding, and fires than ever before. Off-grid living lets us deal with our environmental fears as well as climate anxiety. This lifestyle choice involves disconnecting from public utilities like electricity and water and relying on alternative methods such as solar panels and wind turbines. Traditional homes rely heavily on grid electricity, often powered by fossil fuels. Lovers of off-grid living reduce their environmental impact and gain a sense of empowerment.

There's an economic side to living off the grid, like the freedom from monthly utility bills, especially during economic uncertainty. This is one of the greatest rewards of this type of lifestyle. Truly off-grid living means capturing rainwater and using filtration systems and finding alternatives to waste management practices that reduce waste sent to landfills. With no monthly utility bills, off-grid living encourages a deeper understanding of the natural world with the added benefit of financial independence from the fossil fuel industry.

Unfortunately, the current Trump administration has put a damper on many communities trying to become more self reliant through off-grid living. For example, the Biden administration promised 2 billion dollars to Indigenous tribes to invest in renewable energy. The Hopi Tribe was approved for millions in grants to install solar panels and battery storage for 600 homes. The program was called "Solar for All." At the Hopi reservation, 54,000 tribal members don't have access to electricity, but they would have through solar. The Trump administration calls solar wasteful and terminated the Solar for All programs across the nation.



Overall, the Trump administration has declared climate change a scam and terminated a number of government programs that would have allowed individuals and communities self-sufficiency from fossil fuels. The oil and gas industry donated more than \$75 million to Trump's presidential campaign. In exchange, Trump promised to halt environmental regulations that would have given individuals and communities independence from fossil fuels. Trump also ordered all federal agencies to immediately pause the distribution of funds under the Inflation Reduction Act, which provided financial support for clean energy.

Even with the Trump administration's admitted disdain for anything related to climate change or sustainability, individuals can make a difference by making changes in their everyday lives, such as:

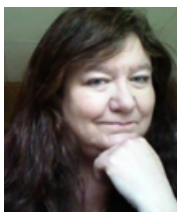
- *Obtaining solar panels for your home
- *Driving less
- *Build smaller homes
- *Joining off-grid communities
- *Using composting toilets
- *Bartering goods and services
- *Planting your own food
- *Reducing plastic use
- *Trying a plant based diet
- *Washing laundry with cold water



While many of us dream of off-grid living, there are many things that we can do in our everyday lives to contribute to sustainability and offset the climate anxiety that many of us feel. Every small action we take in our daily lives can make a difference in the fight to save our planet.

UPDATE: PFAS CONTAMINATION AT FARMER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND SURROUNDING AREA

By: Therese Vick



In June 2024, media reports indicated that wells which supplied Farmer Elementary school were contaminated with PFAS. Farmer Elementary is in Randolph County, North Carolina. The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) advised the county that the water at the school was unsafe to drink. Since that time, DEQ has been conducting well testing around the Wayne Trademark facility. On July 30, 2025, DEQ sent a letter to the company stating: "Dear Parties, The Division of Waste Management's (Division) Inactive Hazardous Sites Branch (Branch) has received information indicating that the above identified property is a source of contamination that has affected nearby private drinking water supplies. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are reported at levels above the North Carolina Division of Water

Resources Interim Maximum Allowable Concentrations (IMAC) in drinking water wells located at the nearby school and surrounding residences a quarter of a mile away."

An IMAC is a measure to regulate a contaminant when a specific standard is not yet in place. It serves as a regulatory tool to protect public health and the environment while the necessary data is collected to establish a permanent standard through formal rulemaking. And "The Division considers the release of PFAS into the environment a high priority for assessment due to the documented risks posed to public health and/or the environment. Based on information provided to date, the Inactive Hazardous Sites Response Act ("IHSRA"), codified under N.C. Gen.Stat. § 130A-310, et seq., applies to the Site. Pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 130A-310.3 and based upon findings of fact, the Branch declares the Site has endangered public health and the environment. Certain provisions of North Carolina law require you to assess and remediate the contamination, under the Branch's regulatory oversight."



FAITH, FOOD, AND THE FUTURE: SUSTAINABILITY WITH PURPOSE AT SUSTAINING WAY

Season Two, Episode 19: This week's podcast episode is out with Michael Brown, Executive Director of Sustaining Way, a nonprofit based in Greenville, South Carolina, that's redefining sustainability through equity, education, and faith.

Through powerful community programs like Annie's House, youth leadership initiatives, and resilient home interventions, Sustaining Way brings together environmental justice, interfaith values, and hands-on action. We're excited to dive into how they're creating a more sustainable and just future.



Search for "In Our Backyard Podcast" on your podcast app or go to <https://anchor.fm/bredl>

REMEMBERING SAM TESH

By: Ann Rogers



It is with heavy hearts that BREDL announces the loss of our former Co-President, Sam Tesh, who passed away peacefully on October 5, 2025. Sam was elected Co-President at the March 12, 1994 BREDL board meeting, and stepped down as Co-President at the April 26, 2025 board meeting. He had been in declining health for several years.

Sam's faithful service as Co-President was preceded by his active involvement in two BREDL chapters, both of which were successful in their campaigns to stop environmentally damaging projects.

The first BREDL chapter that Sam was involved with was Northampton Citizens Against Pollution (NCAP). The chapter was formed to prevent the construction and operation of ThermalKEM, a hazardous waste incinerator. Longtime BREDL staffer, Therese Vick, was a member from the beginning of this chapter and worked with BREDL founders, Janet Marsh and Lou Zeller, to help form the chapter. Therese recalls that she met Lou and Janet for the first time when she attended an organizing meeting in Garysburg, North Carolina to learn about BREDL's Hazardous Waste Campaign, the goal of which was to prevent the selection of a rural community in North Carolina in which to burn huge amounts of industrial byproducts. The state of North Carolina had set up a committee to identify a burn site. The committee considered around 20 different sites in North Carolina, including that of Garysburg, the home of Sam and Betty Tesh. The organizing conducted by Sam and Betty and their neighbors was successful in preventing the incinerator's construction in Garysburg.



It was then that the state targeted Woodland, North Carolina as a site for the incinerator. According to Therese Vick, Sam and Betty Tesh did not give up after their initial victory, but rather stayed in the fight to prevent construction of the incinerator at the new target site in Woodland, which was near Therese's home. Said Therese, "They could have walked away, but they didn't."

Upon learning of plans to build the hazardous waste incinerator in Woodland, the Woodland Town Council planned a public hearing, which was held at Woodland Olney School in 1991. Sam and Betty Tesh attended this hearing and threw quarters onto the stage, which, as Betty later explained, symbolized "30 pieces of silver". Sam and Betty were "walked out" of the hearing after throwing the coins.

Then the Governor's Waste Management Board held the first of two state hearings on the planned waste incinerator. This hearing, located at the Woodland National Guard Armory, was attended by Therese Vick, along with Sam and Betty Tesh. As recalled by Therese, all the local citizens sitting in the audience at this hearing stood up at the same time and began chanting, "NO! NO! NO!" in unison, until the state officials shut the hearing down. Sixteen of the chanters were arrested, including Sam, Betty, and Therese.

The Governor's Waste Management Board then scheduled a second public hearing in 1991, to be held at the Woodland National Guard Armory. In preparation for this hearing, BREDL conducted a training session in Northampton County, which was attended by 80-90 people, at which the decision was made to boycott this public hearing in lieu of a public event organized by BREDL. The decision was made to boycott the hearing because municipal elections were scheduled to be held the day after the hearing, and activists did not want to miss the opportunity to vote for a new mayor after having been jailed for protest at the hearing.

BREDL's boycott event, held the same day as the hearing, was named "Victory Hearing" and involved a big revival style canvas tent, an indoor/outdoor people's hearing, speakers, printed information, cooking and eating, and music performed inside the tent. Lou Zeller wrote and sang a song at the rally that night. The event had a very positive slant, like a victory campaign, with a public turnout unprecedented in the very rural community of Woodland.

The boycotted hearing at the Woodland National Guard Armory was virtually unattended except for state troopers, state security personnel, and government officials. As recalled by Lou Zeller, who was able to peer inside the Armory briefly during the hearing, it was "silent as a tomb". BREDL's attorney, John Runkle, did attend this hearing and presented videotaped comments which local citizens had prepared beforehand.



Citizens Alliance for a Clean, Healthy Economy Banquet in 2010

The Woodland Town Council election happened the next day, and the vote for mayor was won by Bill Jones, a founding member of NCAP. This was a major turning point in the campaign. In September, 1993, the Governor's Waste Management Board cancelled further consideration of Woodland as an incineration site, after which the incineration company, ThermalKEM went bankrupt.

Sam Tesh provided active support and leadership throughout the fight to prevent the incinerator's construction near his home in Garysburg, North Carolina. His involvement continued through the fight which kept it out of Woodland, North Carolina. Sam was elected as Co-President of BREDL in 1994 and later retired with his wife, Betty, to Surry County, North Carolina. Several years later, they were notified of Fibrowatt's plans to build a chicken manure incinerator near their home. In June, 2009, Sam organized a strategic planning meeting at the local Methodist Church in Surry County, at which was founded the new BREDL chapter, Citizen's Alliance for a Clean Healthy Economy (CACHE). Surry County Commissioners had approved the concept and agreed to run a water supply to the incinerator site to run turbines at the incinerator. Sam convened regular meetings of CACHE

to organize the campaign to stop Fibrowatt's planned incinerator, and CACHE participated in many community events to publicize their position against toxins that would be expelled into the atmosphere. CACHE's campaign was actively supported by BREDL, whose research and documentation of environmental impacts of poultry waste incineration can be viewed at: <https://archive.bredl.org/pdf2/ElectricPowerfromPoultryWasteNotGreen070720.pdf>.

Once again, Sam Tesh organized civil disobedience, this time at the Surry Chamber of Commerce street festival. Betty Tesh described the episode in her League Line article published in Fall, 2010:

"In October, 2009, three of our members were threatened with arrest simply because they were wearing badges identifying them as members of CACHE at a downtown festival sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce. They obediently removed the badges, but reported the incident to the local paper, which carried a front-page story on the event. Many people who had been indifferent to our message reacted strongly to this attack on our First Amendment rights and began listening to what we had to say. We received an apology from the town and the police department, but not from the Chamber of Commerce."

At the May, 2010 meeting of the Surry County Commissioners, the commissioner from the Elkin area moved that the county cease any further discussion with Fibrowatt. He said he was doing so because the company had not answered his questions, nor the concerns voiced by CACHE. The motion passed unanimously, effectively bringing an end to a two-year battle.

Reminiscing on his decades of working with Sam, Lou Zeller had this to say – "Sam Tesh was a fearless campaigner. Sam had a street fighter's instinct, was nonviolent, but he understood the big picture of what it takes to win. He was fearless."

Therese Vick, whose work with Sam started in 1990, had this to say – "Sam was not afraid of anyone. He was a strong person. I thought the world of him. Even though we knew he was not well, it doesn't feel good to lose him."

Everyone at BREDL offers our sincerest condolences to Sam's family on the loss of their beloved father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Sam's wife, Betty, passed away in 2018. Together Sam and Betty built a life centered around love, family, and service to others. We in BREDL will never forget Sam's extraordinary devotion to the furtherance of the success of our campaigns and the protection of our Planet Earth.



BREDL AIR MONITORING PROGRAM UPDATE

BREDL PROVIDES FINANCIAL REVIEW ON CARE-4-AIR PROJECT

By: CARE-4-AIR Team

BREDL has just concluded the ninth quarter, 27 months, of our EPA grant funded air monitoring project. Our project began on July 1, 2023 and is scheduled to conclude on April 30, 2027. While we are over halfway through our grant period, we are coming up on finishing just one-third of our data collection.

Our air monitoring collection is slated to conclude at our second site in late October/early November, leaving four more sites to visit. Our Site 3 deployment will commence upon departing Site 2.

The CARE-4-Air project is funded by a grant from EPA and a cost-share obligation from BREDL. EPA funding will provide \$365,368 along with BREDL's cost-share of \$67,486 for a total project amount of \$432,854.

Through the end of September 30, 2025, we have used 72.42% of our EPA funds and contributed 62.55% of BREDL's cost-share obligation.

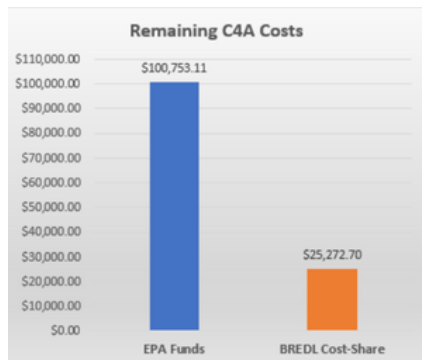
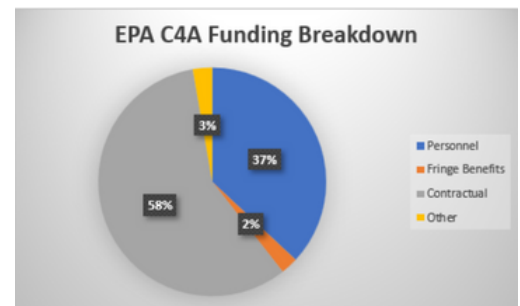
EPA funds are broken down into several categories: Personnel, Fringe Benefits, Contractual, and Other.

Personnel include partial salaries for three BREDL staff members.

Fringe Benefits only include medical stipends for two staff.

Contractual includes the costs for our technical contractor to build the trailer and to offer technical assistance during the project. It also includes part of our driver's mileage and hours to move our trailer.

Other category includes our electrical reimbursement to site hosts and our cellular service data plan for remote access. Likewise, our BREDL Cost-Share is broken down into similar categories: Personnel, Fringe Benefits, Travel, Equipment, Supplies, Contractual, and Other.



We originally slated our cost-share portion to a single category, Personnel. However, early on, we received EPA confirmation that we can use associated grant costs for our cost-share. Our cost-share obligation will cover staff mileage, hotel, food. It also paid for our security camera system, a second VOC Gas module, Alicat Calibrator, various supplies such as filters, trailer extension cords, Wilbur Technical Services' review of our EPA technical document, and accountant fees.

BREDL welcomes any donations to help cover our cost-share obligation as well as non-budgeted costs associated with our air monitoring project. Please visit our Giving section at bredl.org. Our next update will include a look at the Site 2 data.

PRIORITIZING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE



BREDL: WHO AND WHAT WE ARE

In March 1984, fifty citizens of Ashe and Watauga Counties met in the Mission House of Holy Trinity Church in Glendale Springs, North Carolina. Teachers and farmers, home-makers and merchants listened to the report of the Episcopal Church Women on the US Department of Energy's siting search for a high-level nuclear waste dump in the rain-rich east. Recognizing that the North Carolina mountains were a region at risk, the assembled group organized the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) to protect their own backyard and those of other threatened communities.

Since then, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League has grown to be a regional community-based, nonprofit environmental organization. Our founding principles - earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice and community empowerment - still guide our work for social change. Our staff and volunteers put into practice the ideals of love of community and love of neighbor, which help us to serve the movement for environmental protection and progressive social change in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee.

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Does your chapter have a story to share in the League Line?
Submit your article to bredl@bredl.org!

View archived newsletters at www.theleagueline.org

BREDL Credo

We believe in the practice of earth stewardship, not only by our league members, but by our government and the public as well. To foster stewardship, BREDL encourages government and citizen responsibility in conserving and protecting our natural resources. BREDL advocates grassroots involvement in order to empower whole communities in environmental issues. BREDL functions as a "watchdog" of the environment, monitoring issues and holding government officials accountable for their actions. BREDL networks with citizen groups and agencies, collecting and disseminating accurate, timely information. BREDL sets standards for environmental quality, and awards individuals and agencies who uphold these standards in practice

Grassroots Campaigns

Nothing creates hopefulness out of helplessness like a successful grassroots campaign -and our chapters have a history of winning. For over three decades Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League chapters have protected their communities by stopping dangerous facilities and promoting safe alternatives. In the 1980's and 1990's, BREDL prevented a multi-state ThermalKEM hazardous waste incinerator, a southeastern nuclear waste dump and a national nuclear waste dump. In the 2000's, our coordinated grassroots citizens' campaigns have had further victories. We won a legislative victory with the passage of the NC Solid Waste Act, effectively blocking at least four multi-state mega-dumps. Our Person County chapter convinced their Board of Commissioners to reject expansion of the Republic Services landfill. Our Cascade, Virginia, chapter shut down a huge hazardous waste incinerator. Our chapter in Roanoke and Franklin Counties, Virginia stopped an Interstate Highway. We eliminated mercury waste from the Stericycle incinerator, shut down a tire incinerator in Martinsville, won the landmark environmental justice court decision in Greene County, North Carolina. Further, with our chapters we have protected air quality by blocking scores of asphalt plants, four medical waste incinerators, a PVC plant and a lead smelter, and passage by local governments of eight polluting industries ordinances. Our work on nuclear power and coal plants laid the groundwork for our new Safe Energy Campaign. Victories over twenty-four mega-dumps have resulted in our affirmative Zero Waste Campaign. Guided by the principles of earth stewardship and environmental justice, we have learned that empowering whole communities with effective grassroots campaigns is the most effective strategy for lasting change.

BREDL
c/o Virginia Staton, CPA
PO Box 2168
Boone, NC 28607

Annual Membership is only \$20

Thank you for supporting Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League
It's easier than ever to **join**, **renew** and **donate** online.

Check out our secure online donation form and use your credit card at
www.BREDL.org

Or send your check to: BREDL, c/o Virginia Staton, CPA, PO Box 2168,
Boone, NC 28607

All donations are tax deductible.

Name _____

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Chapter _____

Membership Amount: \$ _____

JMZ Fund Donation: \$ _____

**Janet Marsh Zeller
Honorary Fund**

The BREDL Board
of Directors
established this
fund to honor the
work of Janet



Marsh Zeller, who founded the Blue Ridge
Environmental Defense League and
served as its executive director for over
two decades.

**The honorary fund supports BREDL's
endowment and our long-term ability to
serve communities.** Individual gifts are
accepted throughout the year. All
donations to BREDL are tax deductible.
Contributions to the fund will benefit the
organization and honor the woman who
gave so much to make our world better,
one community at a time.