

# Permitting landfill

## Bill sponsored by Baker passes house

BY SAVANNAH HARRISON  
SPECIAL TO THE STANDARD

MONTGOMERY — A bill that would change the way landfills are permitted in Alabama has passed one hurdle in the state House — but it will not affect the proposed Conecuh Woods landfill.

Rep. Alan Baker, R-Brewton, is sponsoring the bill that he says will “provide accountability and transparency in the government.”

This bill would change the state’s permitting process for the creation of landfills on public property. Currently, landfill applications are given automatic approval if the county commission fails to act within 90 days.

Baker is proposing that the law be changed so that the application is denied unless the local government body approves it within the allotted 90 days.

“My hopes are this landfill permitting bill will hold elected public officials accountable for their actions or lack of action,” he said. “This bill is good policy, and the principle of accountability should be consistent throughout the channels of government.”

Baker serves Baldwin and Escambia counties, which have been involved in a dispute over the Conecuh Woods landfill.

In January, Conecuh Woods LLC filed for permission to build a 5,000-



file photo | The Brewton Standard  
**Residents attend Conecuh County Commission meeting in opposition of proposed Conecuh Woods Landfill. Baker's bill would not affect the currently proposed landfill application.**

acre landfill outside Repton.

Since then, the people of Conecuh, which is served by Rep. Thomas Jackson and Sen. Marc Keahey, and the surrounding counties have been involved in heated debates over the controversial nature of the landfill project.

Those in support of the Conecuh Woods landfill have said it will appeal to new and expanding industries and will create jobs. Others worry about landfill leaks and pollution.

Conecuh County commissioners have not taken action on the landfill proposal. They have until April 21 to vote.

The House County and Municipal Government committee approved Baker's bill on March 23.

He said it was a big step but only the first of many,

The next course of action will be asking the Rules Committee to set a date for the bill to be voted on by the House of Representatives.

Baker said that the Conecuh Woods landfill was not his primary reason for sponsoring the bill. In fact, he has co-sponsored a similar bill for the last two years and took on the position of lead sponsor in July 2010.

“I just felt in my heart that I wanted to become lead sponsor of this bill,” he said.

This legislation will not affect existing landfills and, instead, will apply only to new landfill applications.

“This is good policy,” Baker said. “Even though it cannot be made retroactive for the Conecuh Woods landfill, it's still good poli-

cy.”

Industrial landfills are exempt from the bill.

Baker said that this was included to make industries feel protected and is not a central part of the bill.

“It's more cost-effective for some of these industries to have their own on-site landfills,” Baker said.

Co-sponsors include Reps. Randy Davis, Thomas Jackson, Mike Jones, Paul Lee, Harry Shiver, Alan Harper, Steve McMillan, Elaine Beech and Joe Faust.

Like the bill's sponsor, many of them represent southwest Alabama.

Baker said he has “crafted and drafted” two other landfill legislation bills he's currently taking a closer look at.

While he felt it was too early in the creation process to comment on both pieces of legislation, he said one of these bills would add another layer to the permitting process beyond the host county's commissioners. That bill will be up for review by the Commerce Committee.

“I think other legislators very much agree that there needs to be accountability and transparency in government,” Baker said.

Troy University journalism student Savannah Harrison of Brewton wrote this story as part of a project partly funded by the Alabama Press Association Journalism Foundation.

The Brewton Standard, 3/26-27/11, Page 2