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Duke Energy said it would close ash basins at four plants, including this one located in South Asheville, overlooking Lake Julian.

Photo by Ruthie Keith - Staff Photographer

Duke Energy set to trade wet ash for dry

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After receiving complaints and protests from Asheville residents, businesses and organizations, Duke Energy created a plan in November to end their coal ash pollution, according to information from Duke Energy's website.

The plant's property stores coal combustion products, totaling approximately 3.1 million tons in Asheville, and the company continuously evaluates those storage methods, according to Duke Energy.

Two engineered basins, constructed in 1964 and 1982, store ash and serve as a treatment system for wastewater containing coal ash, according to information from Duke Energy.

"Duke will have to remove all of the ash in their two constructed ponds," said **Kevin Moorhead, professor of environmental science at UNC Asheville.** "The 1982 pond is more than half way empty because the ash is being trucked to the airport as fill for airport extension. As soon as the 1982 pond is empty, they

plan on lining that pond to receive future ash." The 1964 pond will be emptied as soon as they finish with the 1982 pond. Switching to dry ash processing will greatly reduce the volume of ash, and the potential for groundwater contamination, Moorhead said. "In my opinion, it seems like a suitable approach to remove the wet ash from the site," Moorhead said. According to Duke Energy, they commit to permanently and safely closing ash basins at the coal plants. The compa-

ny accelerated its work in response to North Carolina's Coal Ash Management Act, which requires closing basins at four plants - Asheville, Dan River, Sutton and Riverbend - by August 2019, with all other plants closing their basins no later than December 2029.

Duke Energy submitted coal ash excavation plans to state regulators in November for the first four plants, including Asheville. The excavation plans detail a multiphase approach for removing coal ash from the site with an emphasis on the first 12 to 18 months of activities, according to information from Duke Energy.

"It is important that any company causing environmental degradation is held responsible for cleaning up their negative impacts," said **Jessica Davis, a senior environmental studies student.** "It is sad that it is only because of fines and regulations that big companies like Duke are compelled to protect our environment."

In October 2013, the Asheville City Council voted unanimously for

a resolution calling on Duke Energy to transition from fossil fuels and onto clean energy, according to information from Asheville Beyond Coal. "Duke Energy's Asheville-area coal plant is the largest source of climate-disrupting carbon pollution in Western North Carolina," said **Melissa Williams, communications manager for Western North Carolina Alliance.** "Years of data confirm that toxic pollution is leaking from its

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State to dip into Pisgah and Nantahala Nat'l Forests

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Proposed logging in the national forests of Nantahala and Pisgah met community disapproval through public commentary, according to conservation officials.

"We have to have lumber to build things, it's a natural resource—it's a renewable natural resource—and that's the issue of these natural resources in our national parks. They are for natural resources, but they're also for recreation," said **Nancy Hodges, watershed resources manager for RiverLink.**

According to the U.S. Forest Service, every 15-20 years, plans for the management of national

forests across the country go through revision, and as national forests contribute to the USDA's sustainable harvest of timber, these plans include the management of logging.

Hodges said although logging is a controversial practice especially to most of the community here in Asheville, along with conservation, the need for timber contributed to the creation of nation forests in the U.S.

"So, I get caught in between this: Wood needs to be supplied. If you can supply it through sustainably harvested mechanisms, then that's better than if you go out and clear cut. You can clear cut on private property; you can't in the national forests anymore," Hodges said.

Through detailed timber management areas, a 2014 assessment of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest's plan deemed about 700,000 acres suitable for the sustainable supply of timber.

These two national forests together total approximately 1,044,393 acres in size, according to the assessment.

"It's disappointing, but to me it depends on where they're doing it and what impacts to the different user groups that that's going to affect, as well as looking at what's the environmental impact," Hodges said. "We've already seen that with the loss of the hemlocks our water temperatures have increased, and so our local trout are really sensitive. If the water is 68-

70 degrees, that's too warm. That's at the top of their range. So, they're stressed at that point. We've started to see declines in some of those fish species. That's a direct result of sunlight, and not having tree coverage."

Sarah Fraser, the stewardship director for Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, said in her experience working with foresters and loggers, they delineate stream management zones to avoid logging near steep embankments.

"My guess is that they've started with a large number knowing that they're going to go into a public comment period, get feedback from the public and pare that

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Photo by Emily Ostertag - Staff Photographer
Pisgah Nat'l Forest at Big Ivy in Barnardsville. A sight deemed suitable for logging.