## RECEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL APPEALS BOARD 1 U.S. E.P.A. Oct 2 ed UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (ASTROPHY AN 10:53 2 ENVIR. APPEALS BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C. 3 4 ORIGINAL 5 6 7 In re: 8 Smith Farm Enterprises, L.L.C : CWA Appeal No. 9 : 05-05 10 11 Docket No. CWA-3-2001-0022 12 13 14 15 16 Washington, D.C. 17 September 19, 2006 18 19 20 21 22

## ACE-FEDERAL REPORTERS, INC.

| 1  | The above-entitled matter came on for status         |
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| 2  | conference, at the EPA East Building, 1201           |
| 3  | Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 1152, Washington, D.C. |
| 4  | on Tuesday, September 19, 2006, at 11:01 a.m., via   |
| 5  | videoconference hookup.                              |
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| 7  | Before:  |
| 8  | HON. KATHIE A. STEIN, Environmental Appeals Judge    |
| 9  | with CHERYL MacKAY, Esq., Staff Counsel to the Board |
| 10 |  |
| 11 | Also present: Annette Duncan, Secretary              |
| 12 |  |
| 13 | Appearances: (via videoconference hookup)            |
| 14 |  |
| 15 | HUNTER W. SIMS, JR., Esq.                            |
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| 1  | APPEARANCES (CONTINUED):             |
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| 2  |                                      |
| 3  | STEFANIA D. SHAMET, Esq.             |
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#### PROCEEDINGS

(Announcement by the Secretary.)

Good morning, counsel.

We're going to proceed first with the status conference in the Smith Farm matter. The conference is being held pursuant to the Board's orders of June 30th and July 13, 2006.

JUDGE STEIN:

With me is Cheryl MacKay, who is the staff counsel for the Board in this matter. Mr. Hunter Sims has already introduced himself as representing Smith Farm.

Could counsel for the Region please identify herself?

MS. SHAMET: Good morning, Your Honor. My name is Stef Shamet, and I am a Senior Assistant

Regional Counsel with EPA Region III. I represent the Complainants, and I will just note that in Region III, the 402 and 404 Clean Water Act programs are housed in different divisions, and therefore it's Complainants, plural.

JUDGE STEIN: I have, counsel, reviewed the statement that Smith Farm submitted on July 13th

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and the Region submitted on September 12th regarding the next steps each party believes we should take in this matter in the wake of the Supreme Court's opinions in Rapanos and Carabell, which I will refer to as Rapanos.

As the Board has indicated in prior orders, it was nearing a final decision in this case when the Supreme Court decided Rapanos. Prior to this time, as I understand it, Smith Farm had not raised the issue of jurisdiction to this Board other than to reserve the question in the event that there was a change in the legal landscape.

I think it's fair to say that there has been a change in the landscape, and before taking any next steps, the Board had wanted to solicit the parties' views on what next steps we should take.

As I understand it, what we have before us is a request or essentially a motion by the Region, to remand the case to the ALJ to reopen the record for the limited purpose of allowing additional evidence or briefing on the jurisdictional question, a request that is opposed by Smith Farm.

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If I understand Smith Farm's position, it believes the parties should have a chance to brief the Board on how the Smith Farm case fits into the post-Rapanos legal frame work, but they believe the facts are sufficiently developed.

Now I'd like to give each party a chance to speak to be sure that we, the Board, are clear in what their respective positions are; and I'd like to turn first to Smith Farm.

MR. SIMS: Thank you, Judge Stein.

When this case first arose, the jurisdictional issue under the Clean Water Act was one of the issues in the case. And it remained in the case until the case law decided by various circuits, specifically the Sixth and the Fourth Circuits, reversed District Court decisions, and ruled in effect, in a manner consistent with the arguments being made by Region III.

Going back to the original record, Region

III argued that there was jurisdiction under the

Clean Water Act because they said there was a

hydrological connection between water bodies that the

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Smith Farm site was adjacent to, and navigable waters.

Smith Farms is not adjacent to any navigable waters, and any connection would have to be a hydrological one, which the EPA argued, under some existing case law, was sufficient nexus to provide jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act.

Smith Farm argued that a hydrological connection was not sufficient; that any connection between any of the wetlands on Smith's site and navigable waters were through intermittent water bodies, man-made drainage ditches, culverts, and the like. Therefore, any wetlands on Smith's site were isolated wetlands and not subject to Clean Water Act jurisdiction.

We believe that the parties fully vetted this jurisdictional issue, and whether or not there's any connection between any wetlands on the Smith Farm site and navigable waters. In the hearings held in this case, there was an extensive evidentiary hearing that lasted, the first time eight days, I believe; the second time six days, where a great deal of the

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evidence and testimony taken was on this point.

We believe that the Supreme Court's decision in Rapanos is teed up, if you will, factually, without the necessity of any further facts. Moreover, we don't know of any other facts that could be introduced.

As the Court knows, the Environmental Appeals Board sits de novo as to legal issues, and we believe that the sufficient facts really for the EAB to make the legal decision on the jurisdiction issue based upon the factual record as it now stands.

Also I believe it is important to note that if the case is remanded for further evidentiary as well as legal arguments to the ALJ, that that will necessarily trigger additional expenses in this case. We have briefed at various times the procedural status of this matter, and just in a nutshell, we believe it's important to note that before the owners of Smith Farms launched upon their project that brought this case to the Court, they met with the Army Corps of Engineers, which at the time the time was exercising Joint Exhibit over this matter, in an

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attempt to determine whether or not a permit on the 404 was necessary before they started the work that they contemplate doing.

They were assured, in a face-to-face meeting between the Corps, owners, and the owners' environmental expert -- who, by the way, used to be an Army Corps of Engineers person as well -- that a permit was not required.

JUDGE STEIN: Mr. Sims --

MR. SIMS: They then sent a letter confirming -- Yes?

Moment here, because the Board is fully familiar with the underlying facts that you are describing; and as I mentioned, we were hearing a final decision, so we're certainly familiar with the fact that there were a number of communications between your client and the Corps during the course of the underlying action; and we're also familiar with the fact that there was a retrial due to the inability of the court reporter hired by the Region to prepare a transcript.

What I'm struggling with is, despite the

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length of, and the necessity of a retrial, we now have in this case the jurisdictional question. -- certainly a different way of looking at the question of jurisdiction, with the benefit of the Supreme Court decision, and while the Board clearly has the authority to deny cases to de novo, we certainly like a full development of a factual record; and obviously we'll hear from the Region in a few minutes, but I'm struggling with why -- and I don't disagree with you that there's been a fair amount of -- it's been a long process in this hearing to get to the point that we're at thus far; but it's hard to say that one could have predicted where the Supreme Court was going to go; and why is it with the Region bearing the burden of proof on the question of jurisdiction and the necessity of the Board grappling with jurisdiction, that we would not want a full development of that factual record.

MR. SIMS: Well, thank you very much, and I won't delve anymore into the expenses that my client has incurred so far. You I'm sure appreciate the reason I would want to mention that, because it

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is an important part of the remand.

But I believe, Judge Stein, that the facts on jurisdiction are already in the record. They have already been developed. Rapanos is another way to look at those facts. It is clear that no one could have predicted Rapanos; in fact, as you know, the District Court in Michigan decided Rapanos one way; the Sixth Circuit decided it another way; and the Supreme Court decided it maybe even a third way, awkwardly.

But in our view, they're all legal views, albeit different to some extent, the same factual scenario. We simply believe that the facts on this jurisdictional issue have already been developed in the record.

JUDGE STEIN: Let me ask one final question, and then I'll turn to the Region.

As I understand it, and this is for Mr.

Sims, what was developed below were facts related to this hydrological connection theory, and it's not entirely clear to me, and I've looked a bit at the record, whether or not the test that may be suggested

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by these plurality of and dissenting and concurring - plurality opinions have necessarily been developed
in this case.

And that is the point on which we find ourselves struggling a bit. Obviously if everything's been developed below, the matter wouldn't necessarily be a need to remand. On the other hand, typically the Board allows the trier of fact, who's had the opportunity to observe the witnesses in the first instance, apply the law to an existing set of facts.

If there's anything else you want to add in response to that, that would be fine.

MR. SIMS: Judge Stein, I also believe, with particular respect to the 402 violation, that there was evidence produced by the Region and by the Respondent, concerning the potential environmental harm and what not, which was discussed by Judge --

Again, it's a long factual record, and nobody today could sit here and point to every single fact in the record; but just believe that that is complete, and is sufficient to allow the Board to

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decide the legal issue presented by Rapanos. 1 JUDGE STEIN: Let me hear from the Region 2 for just a few moments on this question. 3 MS. SHAMET: Good morning, Your Honor, 4 again. 5 I should mention that the call was dropped 6 during your colloquy with Mr. Sims, so I missed a 7 little of it. So if I don't fully respond to that 8 colloguy, I apologize. 9 As Your Honor has noted, the question 10 mainly boils down to whether the Board should apply 11 Rapanos on the current record, or remand to the ALJ 12 with instructions to reopen the record to take 13 further evidence to address Rapanos. And the region 14 recommends remanding to the ALJ. 15 I would point out, the Board has the 16 authority to remand for reopening the record, and 17 that authority can be found at 40 CFR 22.30 18 Subsection C. Which states in relevant part that, 19 quote: 20 If the Environmental Appeals Board 21

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determines that issues raised but not appealed by the

parties should be argued, it shall give the parties reasonable written notice of such determination to permit preparation of adequate argument, the Environmental Appeals Board may remand the case to the presiding officer for further proceedings.

Close quote.

Your Honor, in this case the original record was not deficient under the case law that was then governing. The respondents concede that. They conceded it when they declined to argue the jurisdictional question on the present record under the prior case law. The tests that were enunciated by the Supreme Court in Rapanos were not, nor could they reasonably have been anticipated by the parties.

In fact, the theory set forth by Mr. Sims just moments ago when he was describing the proceedings below, did not match up with any of the tests under Rapanos. In fact, the Rapanos court itself indicates that the pluralities test and Justice Kennedy's tests, were not foreshadowed by the existing case law.

Justice Scalia noted that the various

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cases that were relied upon by the ALJ, and mentioned three in this matter, were quote "not outliers" close quote, but rather, represented the majority.

Similarly, Justice Kennedy noted the pluralities analysis, was quote "unprecedented" unquote.

And Justice Scalia had this to say about Justice Kennedy's test. Quote: To begin with, Justice Kennedy's reading of significant nexus bears no easily recognizable relation to either the case that used it -- which was Swank -- or to the earlier case that that case purported to be interpreting, which was Riverside Bayview.

Region submits, Your Honor, that the record was simply developed with two other tests in mind, neither of which anticipates the tests set forth in Rapanos. Accordingly, while the record is not deficient, this is not a case where the Region did not put in a good record and is now seeking to fix a mistake.

JUDGE STEIN: Ms. Shamet?

MS. SHAMET: Yes, Your Honor.

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JUDGE STEIN: If we were to remand this case to the ALJ for the purpose of reopening the record to take additional evidence, is the Region prepared to say approximately how long they think they would need to put on their case? You know, we're talking about --

MS. SHAMET: Yes, Your Honor.

At this point, the evidence would consist of no more than three witnesses; it may be two.

We're trying to figure out whether we can combine two of them.

All three witnesses will be witnesses who appeared in the prior proceeding; and we anticipate that the presentation of their direct testimony would take about five to six hours.

JUDGE STEIN: Is that all the witnesses combined? Those five to six hours.

MS. SHAMET: Yes, Your Honor.

How do you respond to the concerns raised by Smith Farm about the cost to their client and the length of this proceeding?

MS. SHAMET: We certainly agree that the

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length of this proceeding is unfortunate. However, this is not a respondent who was caught in the trap of an unwary landowner. This respondent knew --

And I'm going to do the same thing that I did to your co-counsel, which is that I'm familiar with the underlying facts, and I really don't want to get into that at this moment. The Board is really trying to decide whether to remand this case or not.

Am I correct that in your request for remand to reopen the record that you would anticipate that the ALJ would then make findings of fact and apply the law, or are you just suggesting that we're remanding this case for a more limited purpose? It was difficult for the Board to determine from the way you phrased things in your statement.

MS. SHAMET: I believe the usual process would be for the ALJ to make findings of fact, and present conclusions of law. Unless the parties could somehow stipulate to the facts, and I have not explored that with opposing counsel; then it would seem the ALJ at a minimum would have to make findings

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of fact. The Board has authority to make a de novo legal determination; and perhaps the remand could be limited to the factual record.

JUDGE STEIN: But in terms of the statement that you submitted to us, you were envisioning a typical remand for reopening the record on the evidentiary points and for the ALJ to make findings of fact and conclusions of law on those points? Is that correct?

MS. SHAMET: Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE STEIN: Okay. Leaving aside this question of possible stipulation of facts, I think I've got a feel for where the parties are, and we'll obviously have a chance to go over this a little bit in Vico as well; but where are we on the question of the possibility of ADR in this case?

The Board does not want to waste anybody's time and money if an ADR process here is fruitless; but we do, as we indicated in our statement, have the possibility of having a judge of the Board who's not a member of the panel to this case, probably assisted by a senior counsel of the Board whom is also an

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discussion.

experienced mediator, to perhaps stay the case for 60 days while the parties explore mediation through this vehicle if the parties are interested.

This is not something that the Board is insisting on; it's really something that if the parties think it would be fruitful with one of our other judges, helping to see if we could resolve something, that's fine.

Where does the Region stand on this?

MS. SHAMET: As our statement expresses,
we're willing to participate in mediation. As
recently as I think last week, I had spoken with
opposing counsel regarding general parameters of
settlement, and I don't know if he's taken that back
to his client and whether he has a view that ADR or
mediation would bear fruit in light of that

JUDGE STEIN: But on behalf of the Region, then, you are prepared to participate in such a process. Is that correct?

MS. SHAMET: Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE STEIN: Let me ask Mr. Sims, and I'm

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really not trying to explore settlement here; I'm really trying to figure out with -- and I'm not going to rule on the request to remand from the bench today; I'm going to take that under advisement. But I would like to know where we stand.

I understand that Smith Farm obviously wanted to wait to hear where the Region was coming from before they fully responded to the Board's query on mediation, and if Mr. Sims could let us know where he stands on that, where his client stands on that question, I'd appreciate it.

MR. SIMS: Judge Stein, just by background, I will tell you that this case and the Amelia case that you'll hear next are two of five or six different enforcement actions brought by Region III, and by Ms. Shamet in the same general geographic area of Virginia.

Ms. Shamet and I have been able to resolve every one of the cases except these two. And I say that to you to demonstrate that while Ms. Shamet and I have fought hard against each other as to the matters that have been litigated, they'd be a shot;

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but we have been able to either agree on things or agree to disagree in a -- manner.

So I believe that my clients are certainly willing to continue discussions with Ms. Shamet; she mentioned something to me last week, which is about the time I learned the Region's position. We have that under consideration, and I believe that we would like to have discussions with the Region about resolving it.

You may not be familiar with Virginia; but in addition to the EPA, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, called the DEQ, also asserts jurisdiction over wetlands or lands that purportedly have wetlands on them. So any resolution of the case, from our point of view, also has to include the DEQ. So we only have one result; it does us little good to resolve the case with EPA and then turn around and start anew with the DEQ.

It is true that the EPA and the DEQ work hand-in-glove as to some matters but not as to all matters; and it's been our experience that if we resolve a case with the EPA, that does not mean that

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the DEQ will just go away.

I say that because it is very difficult, if not impossible, to include the DEQ in any mediation. For that reason, at least at this point, we believe the prospects of a resolution using ADR are not very good. We would prefer to continue our discussions with Ms. Shamet, and counsel-to-counsel through ADR.

And principally, because it's difficult but not impossible to include the DEQ, which is an integral component to resolving this case, in our view.

question, then: In light of that, in terms of next steps, does it make sense to stay this matter for a period of 30 days, initially 30 days, for the counsel to explore settlement possibilities and then report back to the Board as to whether those are continuing to be productive; or alternatively we can go ahead and rule on essentially the pending motion as to next steps, while you folks continue to explore settlement. And I don't know whether our choices

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would influence where you head in terms of settlement; but I'm wondering if, given your settlement discussions, it makes sense at this point for us to stay this matter for 30 days or whether we ought to just cut on the -- get your views on whether we ought to just cut on the pending motion, statements, whatever's pending before us while your settlement discussions continue.

MS. SHAMET: Your Honor, the call was dropped and I didn't hear the question at all.

JUDGE STEIN: I'm sorry about these technical difficulties we're having.

My question was, did you hear what Mr.

Sims said about his view of the prospects of courtsponsored ADR? Did you hear that point?

MS. SHAMET: Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE STEIN: Okay. My question was, whether it made sense to stay this case for a period of 30 days while the parties explore settlement, counsel-to-counsel, or whether the Board should just go ahead and rule on the pending motion; and you can explore settlement as you wish.

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MS. SHAMET: And was that question 1 addressed to me or Mr. Sims? 2 JUDGE STEIN: Well, it's going to be 3 addressed to both of you, so it doesn't really matter 4 to me which order you proceed in. 5 MS. SHAMET: Hunter, do you want me to go 6 first? 7 MR. SIMS: That would be fine. 8 MS. SHAMET: I would be extremely 9 surprised, Your Honor, if the matter could be 10 resolved within 30 days. The settlement that's being 11 contemplated would be a fairly complex one; and not 12 only would it involve the DEQ, but our sister agency, 13 14 the Corps, as well. I think that proceeding along a dual track 15 might be more efficient. 16 JUDGE STEIN: Let me clarify; there's no 17 magic to 30 days, and if people think a stay of this 18 case, pending the expiration of settlement is what 19 makes sense. The Board is certainly open to 20 considering a longer period of time to explore 21 22 settlement.

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What I don't want to do is to prolong this indefinitely. This case has obviously gone on long enough.

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Mr. Sims?

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MR. SIMS: Judge Stein, I agree with Ms. Shamet; I believe the better course would be to

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make your decision, if the case is not remanded we'll

proceed in a parallel fashion. I think if once you

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have a briefing schedule; if the case is remanded we

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will have to get together with Judge Charneski and

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schedule further hearings; all of that's going to

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take some time.

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I believe that that should allow Ms.

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Shamet and I to have further discussions in parallel

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fashion, so that we'll be able to determine whether

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or not we can settle the case. If it turns out we're

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very, very close at a critical time as far as the

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next proceeding, then at that time we could ask for a

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short stay.

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hearing from both parties that you're interested in a

JUDGE STEIN: Okay, well, I think I'm

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dual track; and I want to thank both of you this

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morning. This has been very helpful to the Board in figuring out next steps; and unless either party has anything else that they want to say in terms of the Smith Farm matter, I think I will bring the status conference in Smith Farm to a close.

Mr. Sims, anything additional?

MR. SIMS: No, Your Honor.

JUDGE STEIN: Ms. Shamet?

MS. SHAMET: I would only ask, if Mr. Sims would clarify that Respondent's request is for a briefing schedule, and not for the Board to decide on the record about briefs.

MR. SIMS: Oh, you mean not remanded?

MS. SHAMET: Right.

MR. SIMS: My view would be if the case is not remanded, that the Board should set a briefing schedule so that both sides would be given an opportunity to argue the law before the Board based upon the facts that are already on the record.

JUDGE STEIN: This is how I had understood

Smith Farm's statement from what they had submitted
earlier.

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But let me now bring this status conference to a close. I thank both counsel, it's been tremendously helpful. And the status conference in Smith Farm is now adjourned.

(Announcement by the Secretary.)

(Whereupon, at 11:43 a.m., the status conference concluded.)

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| 1   | CERTIFICATE OF SHORTHAND REPORTER                     |
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| 9   | action in which these proceedings were held; and,     |
| 10  | further, that I am not a relative or employee of any  |
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