

**For Immediate Release**

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**SLAPPED SHUT**

*Great Rivers seeks leave to file a friend of the court brief in a defamation case*

**St. Louis, MO** – On February 20, 2004, Fred Weber, Inc. (FWI) filed its first amended petition for defamation, libel and slander in Fred Weber, Inc. v. Diehl, et al., No 03cc-005145, in the Circuit Court of St. Louis County. The petition named as defendants a corporation, an individual, and also “certain John Does, unknown and unidentified individuals and/or entities.” FWI alleges that the defendants, in a flier, accused FWI of being “trash terrorists.” Great Rivers argues that the suit is a SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) suit. SLAPP lawsuits are brought against individuals and groups who criticize or speak out in public forums about public issues as a deterrent to a legitimate concern.

FWI owns a sanitary landfill in St. Louis County. FWI is the managing member of F.W. Disposal South, LLC, a company trying to put trash transfer facilities at the intersection of Baumgartner and Old Baumgartner Roads in South St. Louis County, and in a nearby quarry. The “John Does” have spoken out publicly against having trash transfer facilities at these two places which are near to their homes.

“SLAPP Suits are a misuse of the judicial system to curtail constitutionally protected free speech. As in the case of FWI v. Thomas Diehl, and Certain John Does, the suits frequently allege libel or slander actions against an individual or organization which has spoken out publicly against a project being pushed through by the plaintiff. The intended effect of SLAPP suits is to discourage and silence the individual or group opposing the project,” said Elsa Steward, Executive Director of Great Rivers Environmental Law Center.

Great Rivers is a nonprofit public interest environmental law center dedicated to protecting the environment by enforcing environmental laws.

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