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Cuomo's pick to run state DEC could be crucial

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The state position that could have the greatest impact on the Southern Tier was not up for grabs on [Election Day](#).

In fact, it's never up for election at all.

There's only one vote that counts when it comes to finding a commissioner for the state's Department of Environmental Conservation: Governor-elect Andrew Cuomo's.

With the DEC's review of permitting guidelines for drilling in the [Marcellus Shale](#) expected to drag into 2011, and an EPA plan to clean up the Chesapeake Bay watershed set to be finalized by year's end, all eyes are on Cuomo as he assembles his administration and decides who will lead the dwindling agency.

Cuomo has been tight-lipped about whom he might select for his cabinet, though he did name members of his transition team earlier this week.

Peter Iwanowicz, Gov. [David A. Paterson's](#) top environmental aide who was named acting DEC commissioner last month, said this week that he had not spoken to Cuomo or his staff about continuing in either role, but said he would be open to joining the administration.

"If they see fit to have a position for me in their administration going forward, I would welcome the chance to continue to serve in state [government](#)," he said.

Environmental groups cried foul when Paterson abruptly fired former commissioner Alexander "Pete" Grannis after a memo opposing layoffs to the department leaked to the media, unsuccessfully launching a campaign to get him reinstated.

In a set of interviews with ProPublica, Grannis, a respected environmentalist who served in the state Assembly for over 30 years, said he'd be "tempted" to return to the post if asked.

Both sides of New York's natural gas drilling debate will be watching closely. Drilling in the state's

portion of the gas-rich Marcellus Shale formation is on hold as the DEC continues its review of its guidelines -- the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS) -- is complete.

An industry representative said they want a commissioner who has no biases toward [hydraulic fracturing](#), a shale gas stimulation technique.

"The industry wants to see somebody that is impartial and dispassionate one way or another," said Brad Gill, Executive [Director](#) of the Independent Oil & Gas Association of New York. "Commissioner Grannis -- who was an excellent choice -- had an environmental background, and we welcome that. We would like to see somebody that will look at the science and our track record, and act accordingly."

Karen Glauber, a New York Residents Against Drilling board member, said she would like to see a commissioner "who realizes the current form of the (SGEIS) is completely inadequate."

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