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## Fracking: Northern Tier offers glimpse of what's to come

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When New York's Department of Environmental Conservation placed a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling in late 2009, all eyes turned in 2010 toward Pennsylvania's Northern Tier, where fracking was happening at a fever pitch.

The Northern Tier has become Ground Zero for everything that's right and wrong with the gas drilling industry.

Energy companies like Talisman USA, Chesapeake and East Resources haven't been shy about spreading the wealth. Landowners who have allowed the companies to drill on their properties have received — in most cases — lucrative lease deals and a steady stream of royalty payments based on the value of the natural gas taken from their land.

Rural fire departments and charitable organizations throughout the region have also benefitted from the largesse of the energy companies that demonstrate their local community partnerships by making sizable donations to these and other similar groups. In November, Chesapeake donated \$100,000 to Guthrie Health System's non-profit Sayre House of Hope. Talisman, through its Good Neighbor Program, donated \$10,000 to Troy Middle School in December. Talisman has also sponsored fundraising events for Big Brothers, Big Sisters, which sponsors youth programming in Bradford and Sullivan counties.

Then there's the trickle-down theory, which occurs when wages earned by those working the drilling rigs or performing one of the many ancillary tasks associated with the drilling industry end up in local merchants' cash registers.

But on the flip side, the increased volume of heavy truck traffic, caused by commercial vehicles driving to and from the drilling sites, is shortening the life span of the region's roads and highways. During summer 2010, two commercial truck drivers were fined a combined total of \$54,304 for carrying weight that exceeded their permits. Meanwhile in 2010, PennDOT held gas companies accountable for repairing damaged roads and continued throughout the year to post back roads with 10-ton weight limit restrictions.

Accidents and spills involving these same trucks were reported throughout the year. In July, PennDOT reported that a one-mile section of State Route 1007 in Bradford County's Tuscarora Township and State Route 3001 in Wyoming County's Laceyville was closed following a spill of mineral oil-based drilling mud down the center of the road.

Environmental issues related to drilling came into sharper focus this year. In Dimock, Pa., measures are being taken to ensure some town residents have fresh water to drink after drilling operations ruined the well water of 19 families, according to the Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection. The DEP suggested, and then abandoned, a plan to pipe water to the affected families from nearby Montrose and have Cabot Oil & Gas Co. foot the bill. Instead, Cabot and DEP agreed on an alternate plan: the families affected would split \$4.1 million, provided by Cabot, and the company would also install gas mitigating systems in each of the affected homes.