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Fracking Should Be Allowed on U.S. Land, Virginia Official Says

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By Alan Bjerga - Jul 8, 2011 11:44 AM ET

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A [Virginia](#) energy official urged the U.S. government not to hinder hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling on federal land.

The U.S. Forest Service is considering rules for the George Washington National Forest in Virginia and [West Virginia](#) that may restrict the technique, known as fracking, on some lands. Limits would needlessly stunt job creation, said Maureen Matsen, a Virginia senior energy adviser, in testimony prepared for a joint hearing today

of the House Agriculture Committee and House Natural Resources Committee subcommittees that oversee federal lands.

Fracking, which injects chemicals and water into rock formations to free trapped natural gas, has been criticized by environmental groups as a risk to safe drinking water. In combination with improved horizontal-drilling methods, it has let producers extract fuel from shale formations in [Texas](#), Louisiana, Arkansas and [Pennsylvania](#) once considered impenetrable.

"There have been no documented instances of surface water or groundwater degradation from fracking in Virginia," Matsen said in her statement.

The federal Bureau of Land Management is considering regulation of the practice on public lands. Final results from a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study of fracking's effects on drinking water aren't expected until 2014, the agency has said.

The BLM understands the importance of energy exploration while staying mindful of environmental needs, said Bob Abbey, the director of the Bureau of Land Management.

"Development of conventional energy resources from BLM- managed public lands will continue to play a critical role in meeting the nation's energy needs," he said in testimony.

Also scheduled to testify are Joel Holtrop, the deputy chief of the U.S. Forest Service, as well as [David Miller](#), the standards director of the [American Petroleum Institute](#) and Amy Mall, an analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

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