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New Yorkers split on hydraulic fracturing; small operations already prevalent

BY WENDY POST (TIMES-SHAMROCK WRITER)

Published: June 18, 2011

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Times-Shamrock Photo/WENDY POST A truck of a type commonly used by the gas drilling industry departs from the Superior Well Services, Inc. plant located in Owego, N.Y.



Times-Shamrock Photo/WENDY POST A truck of the type commonly used in the gas industry proceeds through a residential neighborhood in Owego, N.Y.

TIOGA COUNTY, N.Y. - In July of 2008, a gas drilling process known as hydraulic fracturing was put on hold in New York State so the Department of Environmental Conservation could review its environmental impact. That study continues, with a second draft due by July and high-volume fracking still on hold until a final review is complete.

The prospects of New York's moratorium being lifted, and gas drilling moving forward in New York - Pennsylvania's neighboring state - has drawn opposition from critics concerned with the environmental impacts of drilling, as well as protest from those who are anxious to see the economic benefits that might be derived if natural gas drilling commences.

In a recent report issued by a conservative think tank that was funded by the business-backed Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, up to \$11.4 billion in economic activity could occur by 2020 and up to 18,000 new jobs by 2015 if the state allows gas companies to drill into the massive Marcellus Shale formation.

Newly elected Assemblyman Christopher Friend, agrees with the economic boost that would result from drilling and noted in a recent press release that he was in opposition to legislation that would place a moratorium on issuing any new permits for gas or oil drilling using hydraulic fracturing. "The legislation could potentially close 14,000 wells across the state and threatens thousands of jobs in an economy with over nine percent unemployment," said Friend in his release.

The proposed moratorium would last until June 1, 2012.

Friend further noted, "I opposed this legislation on the grounds that it is premature." He cited that the State's scientists employed at the DEC have until July 1 to release their findings, after which there will be another public comment period.

"This bill reflects the legislature's lack of confidence in its appointed officials to carry out their responsibilities," Friend continued. "I have confidence in our DEC scientists to find out the facts about drilling, so we as legislators can make an informed decision based on reality not hysteria."

Friend summed up his opposition to the proposed moratorium, stating that hasty legislation could not only cripple the current economy, it could also cause New York to miss an opportunity for economic development.

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Opponents to gas drilling in New York have countered Friend's sentiments, with groups organizing throughout New York in opposition of hydraulic fracturing.

Recently, a group of farmers went into debt to sponsor a bold anti-frack event that will be taking place at Ithaca College on June 25.

The all-day event, entitled EPIC No Frack Event, will feature 45 speakers, six movies and ten musicians. The lineup includes more than a dozen well-known non-industry-connected experts, a former industry insider, as well as people living with the effects of fracking and others who have studied it from various disciplines over the last several years.

The event is being sponsored and organized by Jeff and Jodi Andrysick, farmers-turned-filmmakers from Steuben County, who have gone into \$15,000 credit card debt to host this event.

In a recent release, Jeff Andrysick stated, "We put down all our chips. We laid down more than we can afford to host EPIC because we are really concerned for all the people of New York state."

"These are tough times," said Andrysick, "and farmers shouldn't have their pockets picked by the gas industry, which only gives them a fraction of what their gas is worth while jeopardizing their and their neighbors' water supply and property values."

The couple hopes to bring residents from around New York together for this event, and to hopefully form as a group that will then bring their concerns to Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

But in the meantime, in Tioga County, N.Y., portions of the gas drilling industry have already entered into the industrial scene.

In February of 2009, Superior Well Services Inc. began setting up a service center in the renovated Owego and Harford rail yard in Owego, N.Y. The center is dedicated to serving energy companies developing the Marcellus Shale. Typical activities Superior does in support of natural gas drillers are casing well borings and stimulating well production through hydro-fracturing.

When initial operations began at the rail yard, several residents began expressing concerns about the amount of truck traffic in their residential area, as well as the size of the trucks that were arriving for services.

At an Owego Village Board meeting last year, several residents gathered to express their concerns over the traffic, as well as what the county might expect if drilling began in their area.

Since that time, there has been little said by area residents about the traffic, or the potential for increased traffic that the issuance of permits might bring from the industry.

And although the presence of trucks are known in residential neighborhoods near the Superior Wells site, local government agencies, as well as officials from Superior Wells Services, are not making any statements regarding their operations.

As for the Owego Harford rail line, a 26-mile track that runs mainly along Route 38 in Tioga County, they have seen an

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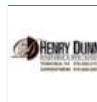
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increase in traffic over the years, and are expecting to see a boom in the next few.

Last year, Doug Barton, Economic Development director, was quoted during a WBNG interview as stating that one of the biggest investors in improving the rail line will be the gas industry.

One of the initial investments Tioga County expects are those from a growing industry in the Twin Tiers - "the gas industry," Barton said in his WBNG interview. He continued, "The products that they use - from pipe to sand, all can be transported by truck or by rail. But, of course, it's much more efficient by rail. It's indicative of the impact that the natural gas industry in Pennsylvania is having on us being so close to them."

Several attempts were made to learn more about the operations at the Owego site, but the inquiries were not responded to. Driving around Owego, N. Y., a small group of employees related to the gas drilling industry are seen in area restaurants, stores, and even occasionally at the Laundromat.

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Residents are expressing concerns over traffic - and there's no drilling allowed yet? Shouldn't this tell them something? Wake up, New York, and learn from our stupidity!. Get your roads beefed up and widened. Get your environmental watchdog groups overstuffed. Beef up you emergency responders and your police forces. Get politicians in office who are on the side of the citizens, not owned by the gas companies. Get waste-water treatment plants built, and test the drinking water in both municipal supplies and for every resident with a private well. Then, and only then, consider allowing hydraulic fracing.

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