

Steve Israel: Pro, anti-drilling forces far, far apart

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Call it the Duel Over Drilling Along the Delaware.

Just eight days before the public hearings on the proposed rules for gas drilling in the Delaware River corridor, those for and against drilling couldn't be further apart.

Here's a preview of what they plan to say at the Delaware River Basin Commission hearings in Liberty and Honesdale, Pa. — according to each side's suggested talking points. They're culled from the Northern Wayne Property Owners Association (pro-drillers) and Catskill Citizens for Safe Energy (anti-drillers).

Those for drilling say the draft regulations are far too restrictive, that provisions like 500-foot setbacks from just about any body of water "will prevent drilling on virtually all land in the basin."

The pro-drillers also oppose the regulations because they're so tough that landowners in the river basin "will not be able to benefit economically as their neighbors in the rest of the state can."

Same goes for businesses in the basin that includes much of western Sullivan County.

Add it all up and the DRBC has too much "discretionary power,"

"There is tremendous potential for abuse and the lack of certainty will discourage investment in our region," the pro-drillers say.

As for those against drilling?

They say the 83 pages of regulations don't go far enough.

"At the very least, the DRBC should hold off" on issuing regulations until the Environmental Protection Agency study on the horizontal drilling method of hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" is released — in 2012.

The anti-drillers also want a cumulative impact study on the effect thousands of wells in the river basin would have on the region — a study that would take years.

As for the provision that allows for faster approval for a plan for several wells in one area, as opposed to individual well review?

"(It) should be struck from the regulations," the anti-drillers say.

Finally, they want more time — and hearings — to comment on the regulations.

Written comments will be accepted through March 16 at www.drbc.net or by writing: Commission Secretary, DRBC, P.O. Box 7360, 25 State Police Drive, West Trenton, NJ 08628.

The local public hearings will be Feb. 22 at the high schools in Honesdale and Liberty, from 1:30 to 5 p.m. and 6 to 9:30 p.m.

Symbolic vote

On Tuesday, Buffalo became the first city in the state to do what other towns might want to do — ban fracking. Just one difference between Buffalo and places like the Sullivan towns of Highland and Lumberland that want to control their drilling destiny. Buffalo doesn't even sit on the gas-rich Marcellus shale.

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