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# Pro-drilling groups critical of natural gas drilling moratorium

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Economic development organizations and landowner groups in Wayne County issued a stinging criticism Thursday against the Delaware River Basin Commission for enacting a moratorium on natural gas drilling and causing a deep negative economic impact by effectively halting development.

The pro-drilling groups, including landowners' alliances that have secured more than 100,000 acres in Wayne County for gas development and the Wayne County Chamber of Commerce, also warned the commission not to develop stringent regulations that would exceed current state environmental regulations because it could deter companies from operating there.

"We want to get the debate started and put our position out," said Peter Wynne, spokesman, Northern Wayne Property Owners Alliance. "We expect there is going to be a degree of severity that exceeds" the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The commission, which has regulated water resources in the four-state area that drains into the Delaware River since 1961, including a large swath of eastern Pennsylvania, has been developing its own environmental regulations over the industry in light of an increased interest in drilling for natural gas in the watershed.

While Marcellus Shale drilling is accelerating throughout the state and regionally in Susquehanna and Bradford counties, there are no producing wells in out the 13,539-square-mile Delaware River Basin, though Wayne County has lured multimillion-dollar land-leasing investments from several natural gas companies since 2007. The Northern Wayne Property Owners Alliance, encompassing 100,000 acres mostly north of Honesdale, finalized a land-lease agreement valued at a more than \$100 million with New York City-based Hess Corp. and Houston-based Newfield Exploration Co. in late 2009.

Meanwhile, the commission enacted a drilling moratorium in May, in particular on production wells, but is allowing 10 exploratory wells to go forward in Wayne County while the regulations are developed.

The moratorium caused Newfield Exploration Co. and Hess Corp. to halt land-lease payments until the drilling ban is lifted. This could amount to the loss of \$220 million

in payments to leaseholders - not including royalties on producing natural gas wells - if Newfield and Hess Corp. decided to pull out of Wayne County, Mr. Wynne has said.

The pro-drilling groups' 10-page letter, which was widely distributed to federal, state and local government officials Thursday and to the five-member commission board, urges the commission to consider the "unparalleled economic opportunities" gas drilling could yield while urging them to avoid the "infinite costs" associated with stiff environmental regulations. It also cites the poor state of the economy in Wayne County, a largely rural area with little to no economic growth in recent years, and how gas drilling could solve these "severe" challenges.

The letter also includes a series of recommendations the commission should take in its effort to regulate the industry. Efforts to reach Wayne County economic development officials were unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, the river basin commission believes it must protect the integrity of the Delaware River watershed - home to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System - while allowing natural gas drilling to occur.

Commission spokesman Clarke Rupert said the agency is trying to ensure that water used by an estimated 15 million people in four states is not negatively impacted by the industry, and criticism of their efforts to ensure that is unfair.

"Do you want to do it quickly ... or to get it right? Our approach is to get it right," Mr. Rupert said. Mr. Rupert said that he does not know what the makeup of the regulations will be, in part because once draft regulations are published it will undergo a series of public comment and public hearing periods that may tweak its final form.

The commission hopes to adopt final regulations by the end of this year, although that is subject to change.

Contact the writer: smcconnell@timeshamrock.com

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**marianS** 3 days ago

This matter affects not only the NWPOA landowners but indeed many other landowner groups as well as other individual landowners. There are literally 100's of thousands of acres impacted by the decisions that the DRBC makes or chooses not to make. There is a time value to all of these decisions and delays. "Doing it quickly" as stated by the DRBC spokes person is a relative term. What is "quickly"? In June of 2008 the process with DRBC began. Is contemplating appropriate regulation over a 2 1/2 year period considered doing things "quickly"? Maybe for a government body it is but not in my world and certainly not in business. If we ran our businesses this "quickly" we would be out of business.

Marian



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**Pidur** 2 days ago

Once again the DRBC is up the old "15-million users dodge." The fact is the overwhelming majority of those "users" live in the Lower Delaware River Basin where they haven't been able to use the water from the river for years because it's laced with mercury, PCBs and dioxin. The folks downriver draw their water from tributaries of the Delaware, not the river itself. Their intake points are way above the tidal line, and there won't be any drilling in their regional watersheds. Those "users" are entirely isolated from anything that goes on in the Upper Basin, where the Marcellus drilling will occur, so what in blazes is Mr. Rupert talking about?

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**Chris Coccodrilli** 3 days ago

Times Shamrock Folks,

Thanks for printing elements of our statement in today's Scranton Times. I do however wish to clear the record on a few issues. First and foremost is the fact that although the letter was written on NWPOA letterhead it represented an additional 100'000 + acres (Total over 200'000 +), in Lower Wayne & LACKAWANNA Counties!. The article has the feel that it is just represented the struggle of a "few landowners North of Honesdale". That is FALSE! Jefferson & Madison Township group & portions of the Lower Wayne Property Owners group in Lackawanna counties, comprise close to one hundred members & roughly 10'000 acres. We are united as an alliance of landowner groups in NEPA & our numbers keep growing. You folks can see the DRB boundary right out your windows in Scranton...just look East at the tops of the Moosic Mountains south of Montage, & North up to Forest city. This is the line of demarcation. To many of us that's our Economic IRON Curtain (EIC), between states rights, property rights & the Republik' of the DRBC. Keep that in mind when writing your stories & keeping your articles fair & balanced.

Regards,

Curt Coccodrilli

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**GassHoles** 2 days ago

Northern Wayne Property Owners Alliance, be ready for the lawsuit as a whole group when one of your wells cause damage. A group of non conforming citizens will hold the Alliance as one group operating collectively when you pollute, decrease, and destroy the area most of us love. We are currently seeking back taxes for carrying the dead weight of the so called Conservation lovers who passed of their tax debt on others and now seek fame and fortune. We are watching..

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**marianS** 3 days ago

This matter affects not only the NWPOA. There are many other landowner groups as well as individual landowners affected by the DRBC decision making or in this case not making a decision. Literally 100's of thousands of acres are impacted in this tiny part of PA. No other place in the state is impacted by this additional layer of government regulation. We are only a small part of the bigger state of PA but we are equally tax payers and voters. Yet we are subject to this additional regulatory delay.

As land owners we want the regulations done right. The DRBC spokes person implies that we wish to have the regulations quickly at the expense of them being right. This is simply not true. What is the definition for doing the regulations "quickly"? In June of 2008 DRBC began the process. Is 2 1/2 years considered too "quickly" to get proper regulations in place? Maybe this pace is acceptable for a government agency but should it be? I think not especially when The Susquehanna River Basin was capable of putting regulations in place in a few months.

If we ran our businesses like this, at this pace we would be out of business! If our employees were so slow to complete a required task they would be fired and replaced. We have waited patiently, we were the sleeping giant and we are now awake! The time has come for no further delays; We need prudent operating regulations NOW!

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