

Pro-gas landowners group forming

BY JAMES LOEWENSTEIN (STAFF WRITER)

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Review Photo/JAMES LOEWENSTEIN
Gary Ide of the group Citizens for Cleaner Energy speaks in favor of establishing an organization that would represent the interests of landowners throughout northeastern Pennsylvania on gas-related issues.

WYSOX TOWNSHIP -- Approximately 35 people gathered at the Wysox Fire Hall on Tuesday to discuss forming a coalition of landowners in northeastern Pennsylvania that would promote the development of the Marcellus Shale.

Several of those who attended the meeting said a landowners' coalition is needed to prevent the installation of gas pipelines from being delayed or blocked.

"One of the primary reasons you need a landowners organization is that there are some very determined people who are using pipelines as targets of opportunity," said Tom Shepp, who is a member of the group Energy in Depth. "They're playing the regulatory agencies, and they are creating a lot of problems."

A large landowners' group needs to form so that the installation of pipelines can move forward, he said. "Otherwise, there will continue to be delays," he said.

For example, he said, a "very small number of radicals" working with a group called Eco Justice has generated 22,000 letters from citizens to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in opposition to the MARC 1 line in Bradford and Sullivan counties, Shepp said.

A landowners group is needed to respond to those efforts, he said.

He said that faced with strong opposition to a project, regulatory agencies may take the easy way out and delay a project so that it can undergo further review.

He said that regulatory agencies will be more interested in what landowners have to say, rather than gas companies, on gas development projects.

Joe DuPont of the Towanda area said he came to the meeting because, due to new government regulations, it will now take three-quarters of a year before pipelines will get approved by government regulatory agencies.

Citizens attending the meeting said that pipelines need to be installed so that citizens can receive gas royalties.

The meeting at the Wysox Fire Hall was hosted by a landowners group from northern Luzerne County called Citizens for Cleaner Energy.

And the president of Citizens for Cleaner Energy said that Joint Landowners Coalition of New York is exactly the type of large landowner's association that he'd like to see formed in Pennsylvania.

Don Fitzsimmons, who represents the Joint Landowners Coalition of New York (JLCNY), which is focused on natural gas issues, said the JLCNY represents 38 different coalitions of landowners, has more than 70,000 members, and has a lobbyist in Albany.

Fitzsimmons said that a similar landowners' organization in Pennsylvania could, for example, work to further reform the Clean and Green law to address gas-related issues, and could lobby in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C. for the increased use of natural gas in motor vehicles.

Fitzsimmons said that anti-Marcellus groups from New York state have been active in opposing gas-related development in Pennsylvania.

For example he said that at a meeting in Dimock, Pa., there were more New York residents than local citizens. "They dominated the meeting," Fitzsimmons said.

The Joint Landowners Coalition of New York formed because its member coalitions felt they would be much more effective working together, Fitzsimmons said.

Among those who attended and spoke at the gathering were state Sen. Gene Yaw and Bradford County Commissioner Doug McLinko.

Organizers of landowners group in Pennsylvania say they want to promote Marcellus Shale development, but in a responsible manner.

Gary Ide said his organization, the Citizens for Cleaner Energy, addresses all gas-related issues of landowners, and that protecting landowners' environment is a top priority for the group.

James Loewenstein can be reached at (570) 265-1633; or email: jloewenstein@thedailyreview.com

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