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## **Rules are in place in Pennsylvania to protect water from Marcellus Shale natural gas drilling**

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Clean, safe drinking water is essential to life and health and not to be taken for granted. That's why some people in Pennsylvania have concerns about increased use of hydraulic fracturing, a drilling technology crucial to developing the commonwealth's massive natural gas reserves in the Marcellus Shale.

But Paul Carpenter's fact-deficient column (March 28) goes beyond rational discussion of concerns. He is trying to scare people into believing that natural gas development companies will destroy Pennsylvania's water supplies and forests. At the same time, he conveniently fails to mention the energy and economic benefits of natural gas development, including thousands of jobs that could be created in Pennsylvania, where more than one half-million people remain out of work.



Let's look at the facts, starting with the environment.

Hydraulic fracturing is a well-understood technology that has been employed in the United States for more than 60 years in more than 1 million wells. It uses water-based fluids to create fissures in rock, through which the natural gas can then pass and be brought to the surface. The fluids are more than 99 percent water and sand.

Before a natural gas well can be drilled, the state approves the well permit and site plan, which includes stringent well construction standards to protect groundwater. It then monitors the drilling operations. Also, wells are drilled away from drinking water wells, usually at depths far below any likely presence of usable groundwater. And, when a well is drilled, steel casing and surrounding layers of concrete provide additional protection to keep the gas produced and any accompanying fluids safely inside the well bore. After hydraulic fracturing fluids are used, they are recycled or disposed of according to federal and state regulations.

The Ground Water Protection Council, an organization of federal and state regulators and others concerned about groundwater quality, found no evidence of contamination of drinking water supplies or increased risk to human health due to the hydraulic fracturing of coal-bed methane wells -- even though more than 10,000 coal-bed methane wells had been completed in the reporting states. Coal-bed methane wells are shallower than the natural gas wells drilled in Pennsylvania and closer to groundwater formations.

In 2004, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded that, although thousands of coal-bed methane wells are fractured annually, there were "no confirmed cases that are linked to fracturing fluid injection into coal-bed methane wells or subsequent underground movement of fracturing fluids."

Mr. Carpenter says not a word about any of this, referring only to a 2008 "episode" in which water used in hydraulic

fracturing supposedly polluted the Monongahela River. He fails to tell you that this water was first delivered to municipal treatment plants, where it was processed then discharged into the river in accordance with state permits. Moreover, when, at the state's request, gas drillers stopped sending their water to the municipal plants, the pollution levels in the river didn't change. This suggests natural gas drilling was at most a minor factor in the river's higher pollution levels, which the state concluded were not a major risk to health.

Mr. Carpenter also tries to stir up fears about the potential loss of state forests, but drilling, which always proceeds under state oversight, doesn't destroy them. The state makes companies comply with an extensive list of precautionary requirements, and it forbids drilling in state parks and areas with high ecological value. State law also requires companies to restore well sites after drilling is completed. Leasing revenues from drilling companies have been used to help purchase additional park lands.

Mr. Carpenter is also utterly silent about other benefits of natural gas drilling. According to a 2009 Penn State study, natural gas development in the Marcellus Shale could generate nearly 100,000 jobs by the end of 2010 and add almost as many more 10 years out. It could also generate \$1.4 billion in state and local tax revenues. And the natural gas produced could be used by Pennsylvanians and other Americans to heat their homes, generate electricity and manufacture fertilizers and petrochemicals.

Mr. Carpenter wants to protect our environment. So do we all. But good decisions on protecting our environment while also producing energy and creating jobs require looking at all of the facts.

An excerpt from Paul Carpenter's March 28 column:

Hunters, hikers, anglers, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, bird-watchers, environmental kooks, campers and others may think some portion of Pennsylvania's state forests should be preserved for them, or for the critters who live there. They'd better get over it.

There are interests that covet all 1.5 million acres of state forest land situated atop the Marcellus Shale formation -- and they have the means to ease the suffering of impoverished state politicians with huge political campaign contributions.

Last month, I discussed a scheme by "wheeler-dealers" to destroy forest land by drilling for natural gas with a process called hydraulic fracturing. I recalled the robber barons of the past who raped the environment, especially in coal regions.

Each hydraulic fracturing well similarly devastates the land and poses threats to clean water. If the wheeler-dealers get their way, forests of trees could be replaced by forests of such monstrosities.

A few days ago, Sara Banaszak of the American Petroleum Institute came to The Morning Call's office in Allentown to set me and others here straight.

The gist of her argument was that if the energy industries do not get what they want, it will result in our greater dependence on imported fuels. The wheeler-dealers, you see, are only being patriotic. Â...

In my Feb. 10 column, I discussed a 2008 episode in which hydraulic fracturing, which forces water into the ground to help release gas, had polluted the Monongahela River, affecting the drinking water of 700,000 people. I also said energy companies spent at least \$1 million on lobbying and campaign contributions in a campaign to kill a proposed "severance tax" on the gas they extract. Â...

Each hydraulic fracturing well uses millions of gallons of water to break up subterranean formations, and much of it is spit back out at the surface, loaded with contaminants. Will her industry ensure, I asked, that the water will be restored to the way it was when taken from our rivers?

"Water management issues are being addressed," said Banaszak, noting "a well developer must have a water management plan approved before well development permits can be received." She indicated such a plan may include dumping contaminated water into "municipal water treatment facilities."

Of the 1.5 million acres of state forest land over the Marcellus Shale, 700,000 acres are already under energy industry control. Of the remaining 800,000 acres of forest land that is still safe, how much does the energy industry want? All of it?

"The industry does not decide on what acreage the state [will lease]," she replied.

A report she referenced in a later e-mail asserts water needed to drill a well each day was comparable to that used on a golf course over 28 days; she also pooh-pooed the Monongahela River problem as nothing more than "a well completion issue."

State Rep. David Levdansky, D-Allegheny, where the Monongahela flows, has emerged as a top gas industry adversary.

"We are the stewards of the best state forest system in the United States, and I will do anything and everything within my power to see that legacy passed onto my children and future generations of Pennsylvanians," he said in a press release. "The state forest land was acquired and expanded to provide a source of recreation for Pennsylvania, not a source of revenue for the extraction industries."

*Rolf Hanson is executive director of the Associated Petroleum Industries of Pennsylvania.*

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