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## Questions asked, answered in fracking debate -- but still no fracking in N.Y.

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A lot happened. And nothing happened.

Despite an increasing spotlight from the national media and an intensifying battle at the local and state levels, 2010 was much like previous years when it came to substantive drilling in New York's portion of the Marcellus Shale: there wasn't any.

That's not to say there weren't any developments.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under an order from Congress, began a lengthy study on the impacts of high-volume hydraulic fracturing, a stimulation technique used by the industry to break shale formations and release gas.

The agency scheduled four meetings nationwide on the scope of the study, the last of which was set for Binghamton University in August. But just two days before it was set to take place, the agency moved that hearing to Syracuse after it couldn't agree with BU on how much security was necessary, and who would pay for it. A day later, it was postponed.

Two weeks later, a deal was announced between the EPA, Broome County and the City of Binghamton to bring the hearing to The Forum and expand it to two days, with the federal agency picking up the tab for all theater and security costs. The meetings went off without a hitch, with about 1,350 people attending over two days.

Meanwhile, Broome County received a pair of natural gas lease offers for county-owned land from Inflection Energy, a small company in Denver. The first, which came in July and offered \$16 million up front for the rights to 5,610 acres over five years, was pulled by County Executive Barbara J. Fiala after it didn't have support from the legislature. The second — \$7.8 million for 3,200 acres of rights for five years — was voted down by the legislature, 10-3, in November.

Both offers came with 20 percent royalties and an option to extend the lease for an additional bonus payment.

The biggest news came just before year's end. After the state Legislature passed a bill that would ban most new hydrofracking permits until May 15, Gov. David Paterson vetoed it. Instead, he ordered the state Department of Environmental Conservation to release a second draft of its permitting regulations "on or about June 1, 2011" with a public comment period of at least 30 days to follow.

Until that document is finalized, major development of the Marcellus Shale remains on hold.

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