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Groups say natural gas drilling could impact outdoor recreation; coalition forms in response + SHARE   

(2011-06-23)

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NEW PALTZ, NY (WAMC) - For those opposed to natural gas exploration in New York, the arguments are often based on the potential environmental impacts of drilling. However, some are now making their voices heard regarding the potential impacts drilling could have on the recreational activities they love. WAMC's Hudson Valley Bureau Chief Greg Fry reports...



John Barone is an attorney in Albany, who also serves as Vice President of Conservation for the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, a not-for-profit that promotes stream and river protection. Barone says his organization has a laundry list of concerns that need to be addressed regarding potential natural gas exploration. He says the two that sit at the forefront are water quality, and the location for the industry for gas drilling activities.

Barone elaborates on the potential impacts on fishing, and on the environment. He says trout, and the insects on which they feed, need cold, clear water, and a sediment-free riverbed and environment to live in. He says the ecosystem, in essence, acts as an indicator of the health of a stream.

The organization has joined the Sportsmen Alliance for Marcellus Conservation, a collection of groups from states where the Marcellus Shale lies. The alliance is seeking to mitigate the impacts of drilling in the Marcellus Shale on outdoor recreational activities, such as hunting and fishing.

Katy Dunlap is with Trout Unlimited, a conservation organization also involved with the alliance. She uses the example of Pennsylvania, where a significant amount of land - some of it public - is now being used for drilling operations. She says access has been restricted in several state forests, keeping sportsmen from unique areas.

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As an attorney focusing on environmental and real estate law, Barone sees what landowners often consider, when deciding if they want to sell their land for drilling operations. He says landowners generally focus on three issues: impacts to the value of the property, health effects, and use of the property. In the case of the alliance, Barone says those uses include hunting and fishing. However, he says there are concerns about areas of interest such as farming and wildlife viewing.

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Barone adds that one of the reasons the alliance is not opposed to gas drilling is because many sportsmen are facing questions about whether or not to lease their land.

New York State Senator James Seward has attempted to have a constitutional amendment created, which in essence would protect the rights of New Yorkers to hunt, trap, and fish. Seward acknowledges that natural gas exploration could have an impact on the activities he seeks to protect in his measure. Seward says it bears

watching, but says his proposed amendment was in no way brought forward because of the possibility of gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale.

Meanwhile, the alliance is reaching out to lawmakers, and to the State Department of Environmental Conservation, as they attempt to make their concerns known.

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