

Slowing Down Fracking in Athens County – Why and How?

Athens County has great natural beauty, forests, lakes and wildlife. However, the boom and bust of the coal industry has left longstanding marks, from deforestation and acid mine drainage to the socio-economic problems of an area that lost its industry without a replacement. There are good reasons to believe that the current fracking boom will just be another flash in the pan and leave the area with even more problems without bringing real benefits to us.

Landowners all over Athens County are currently being approached aggressively to sign leases for their mineral rights – some see this as a great opportunity but rushed decisions based on insufficient information are not good. Many leases use very vague language that leaves landowners vulnerable to damage without compensation or legal recourse. It is particularly concerning that most leases give fracking companies a lot of leeway while barely addressing environmental side-effects of fracking. Landowners should be very careful with what they sign, seek the help of independent and knowledgeable attorneys, and make only contracts that really protect them in the long run or – better – not lease at all.



Dow Lake

Why is Fracking a Problem?

Fracking, short for horizontal high pressure hydro-fracturing, is not identical with conventional vertical gas well drilling. It is a recent and highly controversial technology because of possible drinking water and air pollution from methane and fracking chemicals, community disruption, and its potential impact on public health, quality of life, and local infrastructure. According to the *Shale Gas Subcommittee of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board*, such adverse effects are to be expected "even when individual operators conduct their activities in ways that meet and exceed regulatory requirements."

The claim that we have strong enough environmental laws that protect us from the side-effects of fracking is misleading because the gas industry is exempted from seven of the fifteen major federal environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Superfund Act – these exemptions are often referred to as the "Halliburton Loophole." Unfortunately, the State of Ohio has very few effective regulations in place for the gas industry, which allows for fracking to happen largely outside of the law and without sufficient oversight.

What can be done about this?

Establishing a Moratorium on Fracking

In the interest of the health and well-being of our community, our country, and the environment, we ask for a state-wide moratorium on horizontal drilling and high pressure hydraulic fracturing gas extraction until...

- 1) independent and reliable environmental impact studies on the risks and side-effects of all aspects of the fracking process have been conducted;
- 2) stronger environmental regulations are in place to monitor the drilling process, cement casing stability, water and air quality, and waste disposal sites, before, during, and after operation;
- 3) better monitoring capacities are in place (currently ODNR has only 40 well inspectors for about 65,000 wells, and very few of them are trained in horizontal hydraulic fracturing issues);
- 4) stronger and reasonable taxation is in place that gives counties and communities a fair share of the benefits and that includes remediation and other follow-up costs.

Recent pending bills in the Ohio Legislature (SB 213 and HB 345) aim at imposing a moratorium on fracking. Additionally, pending SB 212 requires full disclosure of drilling chemicals and asks for other changes to fracking regulations. Although the moratorium in those bills is only tied to drinking water issues and not to all criteria listed above in points 1 to 4, it is a first step and worth being supported.

In light of a practice that blindly ignores fundamental cautionary measures to protect humans and the environment, a moratorium on fracking is a reasonable and necessary step, regardless of whether one supports or opposes hydraulic fracking.

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