



CHESAPEAKE BAY
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Press Release

from the CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION &
PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF TROUT UNLIMITED



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CBF and TU Call for Ban on Marcellus Gas Wells in Floodplains *Hydrofracking in floodplains is an environmental disaster waiting to happen*

(HARRISBURG, PA) -- In the rush to develop the Marcellus shale formation in Pennsylvania, natural gas wells are being permitted and drilled in floodplains. Two such wells, one operated by Stone Energy along Wyalusing Creek in Rush Township, Susquehanna County, and one operated by XTO along Muncy Creek in Shrewsbury Township, Lycoming County already experienced flooding events. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) and Trout Unlimited (TU) call upon the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to remedy this clear environmental and public health hazard.

“The handling of fracking chemicals and highly contaminated drilling wastewater in floodplains is an environmental disaster waiting to happen. It has to stop,” said Matt Ehrhart, executive director of CBF’s Pennsylvania Office. “Permitting well pads in floodplains causes a very serious threat of pollution. We call upon DEP to use its authority under the Clean Streams Law to order the companies operating these wells to permanently cap and abandon them, and then reclaim the sites to their natural condition.”

While current regulations do not allow well pads to be located within 100 feet of streams or within the floodway without an encroachment permit, neither the Pennsylvania Oil and Gas Act nor its regulations prohibit siting wells in floodplains. Because horizontal drilling technology is used to drill into Marcellus shale, the gas underneath streams and floodplains can easily be accessed from a pad location in an upland area, avoiding risk of flooding and catastrophic pollution to Pennsylvania’s rivers and streams. There is no reason to site wells in floodplains.

“This loophole must be closed immediately,” said Dave Rothrock, president of the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited.

In late January, heavy rains hit northern Pennsylvania and several streams and rivers experienced flooding events, including Wyalusing and Muncy Creeks. Both the Stone Energy and the XTO sites were flooded as a result of these events.

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“The risk of pollution to our streams will increase exponentially in a matter of weeks,” said Rothrock. “As we head into the season of snowmelt and spring rains, there should be absolutely no more well drilling activity in floodplains anywhere in Pennsylvania.”

The Stone Energy site was permitted along Wyalusing Creek by DEP without the necessary encroachment permits. While DEP issued a notice of violation to the company the week before the flood, the agency should have never issued the well drilling permit in the first place. CBF has previously highlighted serious flaws in the fast track permitting process implemented by DEP since April 2009, where permit applications do not receive careful environmental review but are instead pushed quickly out the door.

In August 2009, CBF appealed three erosion and sediment control permits issued by DEP for drilling sites in Tioga County. CBF’s appeals resulted in a DEP review of the plans and revocation of all three permits because of serious deficiencies.

“The Stone Energy site is yet another example of permits being issued without the necessary review,” said Ehrhart. “DEP should not have issued a drilling permit that close to the creek, plain and simple. If the agency was spending any time looking at the proposed location, it would have known that.”

Governor Rendell recently announced plans to hire 68 new DEP staff to bolster inspection and environmental compliance as Marcellus Shale development expands, and DEP announced plans to open a new regional office in Scranton to increase its presence in the northeast, where much drilling is already taking place.

“We are glad Pennsylvania has taken these actions,” said Ehrhart. “We hope that DEP will take advantage of these new staff and resources to ensure more careful review of permits.”

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Editor’s note: Photos of the Stone Energy flooding can be found at:
<http://home3.netcarrier.com/~susquehanna/page0002.html>