

WATER

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters PA-CEF
Water Resources Education Network Project

POLICY NEWS

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What's New ...

If you've been involved with WREN in the last 10 years you know Sherene Hess. Sherene has been the face of WREN for that many years, and has built it into a well-received program that makes the League of Women Voters of PA proud. So it's with great sadness that we inform you that Sherene has left WREN, and taken a job as the Resource Conservation and Development Coordinator for Penns Corner RC&D Council in Westmoreland County - we wish her well.

Big Changes For WREN

However, if you've been involved with the Source Water Protection side of WREN, you know Julie Kollar, and will be glad to know that WREN will continue in almost its present form under Julie's capable and enthusiastic leadership.

We say "almost" its present form, because DEP has told us that Source Water Protection grants for community projects will not be funded for the coming year (the 2009-2010 WREN grant cycle). We're calling this

a "hiatus," and hope to have funding for community source water protection projects restored in future years.

Meanwhile, we're looking at other ways to help community groups get the word out about the importance of protecting drinking water sources.

If you've been planning a project, think how you can make it work as a watershed education project. The 2009-2010 NonPoint Source Watershed Education grant application will be available in early December.

Marcellus Shale - the new Pennsylvania Gold Rush - and a Promise to Keep

Geologists have long known that deep in Pennsylvania's bedrock, in a layer called Marcellus shale, there was a large quantity of natural gas. But getting it out of the ground cost-effectively was a huge challenge. Almost a mile down, and trapped as small bubbles in hard rock, Marcellus shale gas seemed beyond reach.

However, with new technology, and higher energy prices, developing the Marcellus shale gas is now a reality. In central and northern PA, a new gold rush is on. Landowners are signing leases for gas exploration and development and seeing returns from their land they never dreamed they could achieve. And permit applications for gas wells are flooding into PA DEP - and the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC).

Water is key to the development of gas wells, a lot of water (1-5 million gallons per well). The gas can only be released from the rock through a

process called hydro-fracing; water is pumped into the well under pressure (along with "fracing fluids" whose composition is a trade secret) to pulverize the shale, forcing the gas out of the rocks and into the well. Then the water, and gas, are pumped out.

When the SRBC learned of the amount of water required for each well, they began to require the drilling companies get water consumption permits - to regulate the withdrawal and consumptive use of water.

SRBC received 92 permit applications for water use for gas wells between July and September. Water suppliers in the region are negotiating to sell water to gas companies, and wastewater treatment facilities are being approached to treat the discharge water, which is contaminated with fracing chemicals and salts from the ancient sea where the shale deposits formed. In most cases, the water used by, and discharged from, the

drilling operation goes to and from the site in trucks - a lot of trucks.

Carol Collier, Executive Director of the Delaware River Basin Commission reports that the DRBC has had a lot of inquiries, but no permit applications, yet.

For the rest of the state PA DEP has developed an "Application Addendum for Marcellus Shale Gas Well Development" requiring permit applicants to demonstrate how much water will be used, where it will come from, and where it will be treated.

Pennsylvania's Governor Rendell has stated that we will develop the Marcellus shale gas deposits, but promises we will do it in a way that protects our water resources.

Those of us who are involved with water education programs in our communities will need to help get the word out about the benefits and risks of PA's new "gold" - and assure this promise is kept.

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Resources ...

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The WREN project provides funding for local groups engaged in water education projects and communications links between groups and individuals interested in improving local policy making for water resource protection. Local and statewide activities that focus on water resource education will be highlighted in each issue of **Water Policy News**.

Articles about water education activities are solicited from the readers of Water Policy News. Send newsletter items to Editor: Edith Stevens, estevens@ptd.net.

To receive this free newsletter or inquire about the resources available from the WREN Project, visit <http://wren.palwv.org>, or call the LWVPA at 1-800-692-7281 or wren@palwv.org.

Questions about WREN?

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