Natural Gas Production and NYS Water – *What Can We Learn from Pennsylvania?*

The Monongahela River joins the Ohio and Allegheny rivers near Pittsburg. Its basin intersects Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia and Ohio – a region with active Marcellus shale gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing. The wastewater from hydraulic fracturing is a slurry of sediments and proprietary chemicals that must be treated as hazardous waste.

In the fall of 2008, U.S. Steel alerted the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) that **total dissolved solids** (TDS) in the Monongahela River were higher than allowed. State monitoring of the river had not discovered this. The PADEP investigated and discovered that the pollution originated from the natural gas drilling that used horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing. The PADEP had allowed wastewater from the drilling to be treated at local sewage plants, and then released to the river. TDS are not always successfully removed from sewage plants; couple that with the seasonal low flow of the river, and dilution was NOT the solution for this pollution. A new treatment plant, costing $500 million, has been proposed and needs to be online by 1/1/2011, or this type of drilling in Pennsylvania will come to an end.

In September, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) is planning to release the **Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement** that will regulate horizontal drilling and high-volume hydraulic fracturing. The NYSDEC has an excellent, dedicated staff, but the NYDEC also has half the staff it had 10 years ago! Even when regulations are followed and no drilling sites leak into our drinking aquifers, can our officials keep up with inspections and testing at thousands of drilling sites? Can our wastewater treatment facilities handle the burden?

Citizens of New York also need to consider:

- Where will the millions of gallons of water for each hydraulic fracturing come from? Clearly, our lakes, rivers and aquifers will be the source. Since upwards of 70% of “fracking” fluids will remain in the well and is not recoverable, this represents the loss of billions of gallons of fresh water that will never be replaced in the watershed.
- Will the regulations for drilling and wastewater treatment adequately protect our wetlands, waterways and drinking water supplies? Who will pay millions of dollars to build additional wastewater treatment facilities – your municipality or the gas prospecting companies?
- Who will pay to rebuild the rural roads damaged by thousands of trips by 80-ton trucks filled with wastewater and drilling rig equipment? Will the royalty profits make up for the potential 24-7 noise, 30-day gas burn-off fumes, rutted and impassible roads, or contaminated drinking wells of the local inhabitants?
- How will this drilling affect our local businesses , the wineries, agriculture and tourism? They depend on fresh water and beautiful scenery. Will we be risking these businesses for a few decades of natural gas production?
- How can we assess conflicting news reports? Where are the best sources for accurate information at the state and federal levels? How is information slanted by competing stakeholders?

If you'd like to delve into these issues and more, come to the October 19th Forum. Find out the pros and cons of drilling for natural gas in New York State and what we can do to protect our environment. Be prepared with questions to ask our experts.