

Conservation Committee Report

Volume 12 Issue 5

By Jack Walters, ACSL Conservation Chair

May 2010



The Conservation Pledge

I give my pledge as an American to save and faithfully defend from waste, the natural resources of my country; the soil, the water, the air, the minerals, the plant life and the wildlife.

This is my Pledge!

Inside this issue:

PA Must Take Action to Protect Water Resources from Drilling Wastewater, Other Sources of TDS Pollution

Proposed Rules will Help Keep Drinking Water, Streams and Rivers Clean

High levels of total dissolved solids pollution from natural gas drilling and other sources pose a real threat to Pennsylvania's streams and rivers, including aquatic life, warned Department of Environmental Protection Secretary John Hanger today.

"The treating and disposing of gas drilling brine and fracturing wastewater is a

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Groups Urge Governor, General Assembly To Suspend State Forest Gas Leasing

The [Pennsylvania Environmental Council](#) , [PA Chapter of The Nature Conservancy](#) and the [Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#) this week wrote to Gov. Rendell and every member of the Senate and House urging them to suspend any further leasing of State Forest land for Marcellus Shale drilling until the environmental impact of the drilling can be assessed.

The following is the text of the letter--

Dear Governor Rendell and Members of the General Assembly,

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PA Must Take Action to Protect Water Resources

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significant challenge for the natural gas industry because of its exceptionally high TDS concentrations,” said Hanger. “Marcellus drilling is growing rapidly and our rules must be strengthened now to prevent our waterways from being seriously harmed in the future.”

Hanger pointed to recent examples where TDS impaired streams and affected major sources of drinking water.

In 2008 and 2009, TDS levels exceeded drinking water standards along the Monongahela River, which is a major source of drinking water. Drinking water treatment plants do not have the equipment available to remove TDS, so any water polluted with TDS goes into Pennsylvania’s homes and businesses.

Similarly, in early September 2009, excessive TDS levels led to an environmental disaster that wiped out 26 miles of Dunkard Creek in Greene County, as well as many miles of the creek in West Virginia. These high TDS concentrations, coupled with other factors such as temperature and nutrient concentrations, enabled golden algae to bloom and created an inhospitable environment for aquatic life. The algae released toxins to the water column that literally wiped out aquatic life, including at least 16 species of freshwater mussels and 18 species of fish.

Dunkard Creek is an example of what can happen if TDS is not controlled, said Hanger, and the loss of this important public resource was an environmental and economic tragedy.

TDS is a measure of all elements dissolved in water that can include carbonates, chlorides, sulfates, nitrates, sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium. In addition to natural gas drilling, other sources of TDS include, abandoned mine drainage, agricultural runoff, and discharges from industrial or sewage treatment plants.

For more information, visit www.depweb@state.pa.us.

Suspend State Forest Gas Leasing

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We write today to express our concerns with respect to the scale, pace and potential impacts of natural gas production on Pennsylvania's State Forest lands. At this time, we respectfully urge that any additional leasing of State Forest for natural gas production be suspended until the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) has sufficient opportunity to fully evaluate both the extent of impacts from already-leased acreage and the values and sensitivity of remaining un-leased State Forest lands.

We recognize the management history of Pennsylvania's State Forest system and DCNR's ongoing commitment to accommodating responsible and multiple uses of this extraordinary public resource, including mineral extraction. However, decisions regarding the resource management of these public lands - which fulfill an impressive array of ecological functions and public uses - should be made with science, sustainability and the health of the forest system as the primary goals, rather than the need to achieve specific revenue targets.

The reality is that almost 700,000 acres of State Forest are potentially available for natural gas production right now – roughly a third of our State Forest lands. In the past two years alone, DCNR has leased almost 107,000 acres within the Marcellus region. It also is important to point out that the Commonwealth does not own the subsurface mineral rights under approximately 290,000 acres of State Forest, raising questions about the potential scope and scale of surface activity in these areas.

These public lands are the result of more than a century of public and private investment, held in trust by the state for public recreation and tourism, wildlife habitat, water quality protection, other ecological functions, and timber production. All of these public values provide real economic dividends for our state and provide all citizens of the Commonwealth with the opportunity to enjoy our tremendous natural resources.

With only a handful of Marcellus wells drilled to-date on State Forest lands, we currently lack sufficient data and experience to truly evaluate the nature and extent of impacts. Important questions remain regarding how this form of natural gas extraction will affect:

- Forest health, unfragmented core forest areas, wildlife habitat, and water quality – both site-specific and cumulative impacts.
- Recreation, hunting, and other public uses.
- Economic initiatives like the PA Wilds, which seek to increase tourism and community revitalization based on access to natural amenities.
- Forest Stewardship Council certification of our State Forests, which helps to ensure sustainable management and bolster our state's timber industry.

According to recent reports, the natural gas industry could have as much as seven million acres of

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Suspend State Forest Gas Leasing

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land already under lease in the Marcellus region of Pennsylvania. Given the pace and scope of gas development poised to occur in our state over the next several decades, DCNR lands will be central to any long term forest conservation framework in Pennsylvania, and protecting their integrity likely will be of ever-increasing importance.

DCNR should undertake a rigorous and science-based study to monitor the effects of natural gas production on already-leased State Forest lands. This study should assess the adequacy and effectiveness of current lease terms and conditions and environmental review, identify opportunities for improving best management practices for site development and operation, evaluate the impact of infrastructure (e.g., roads, pipelines, compressor stations, pits/impoundments) on public use and environmental quality, and achieve a clearer understanding of how the State will manage public lands where it does not control the mineral rights - including areas of State Forest and a considerable amount of State Park lands.

In addition, DCNR should be afforded the opportunity to assess and document the ecological and recreational values of remaining un-leased State Forest lands, and their vulnerability to disturbance from gas development.

Responsible stewardship requires that these critical questions be addressed in a thorough and comprehensive manner prior to the potential consideration of proposals for leasing additional State Forest land. We appreciate the difficult fiscal circumstances confronting the Commonwealth at this time. We submit, however, that it would be unwise for the State to respond to current economic pressures in a manner that risks the long term health and sustainability of one of our most precious and valuable natural assets – the State Forest system. Accordingly, we urge the consideration of alternative revenue options to help meet anticipated budget demands.

In conclusion, we support an interim suspension of additional leasing of State Forest lands for natural gas production, pending completion of applied research to assess the impacts of this activity on the integrity and viability of our State Forests.

NewsClips: [Senate Confirmation Vote Nearing On DCNR Chief](#)

[Lease More State Land? Impost Natural Gas Tax?](#)

Source: PA Environmental Digest

EPA Responds to the BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico

Since the BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico on April 22, 2010, EPA has mobilized resources to support the U.S. Coast Guard and protect public health and the environment. Our Emergency Operations Center at headquarters has been activated, trained EPA responders are working on the scene, and special mobile equipment has been sent to the Gulf area.

We have several online resources available:

1) We're posting updated data and other information on our [BP oil spill site](#) :

- Get air quality and water data
- Find answers to common questions
- Submit technology solutions

2) Connect with us on social media sites:

- Administrator Jackson's personal account of the response to the oil spill: [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)
- EPA's announcements about our response: : [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

3) Please subscribe to our oil spill updates at

http://service.govdelivery.com/service/subscribe.html?code=USAEPA_389.

You can also visit the [coordinated government response site](#) for:

- Information about the spill and efforts to stop the oil from flowing
- Hotlines to report oil on land or injured wildlife
- Details of how you can volunteer

Source: U.S. EPA

Pennsylvania's Earth Day 40 Schools Challenge

And the winner is...



Haine Middle School, Cranberry Township, Butler County, is the grand prize winner of Pennsylvania's Earth Day 40 Schools Challenge for its unique project to provide residents with rain barrels to conserve water. Northern Cambria Middle School (Cambria County), Avon Grove Charter School (Chester County), and St. Marys Area Middle School (Elk County) received honorable mentions for their conservation projects. Twenty-one schools took part in the Challenge, honoring the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. The grand prize will turn Haine Middle School into a park for a day on June 3 with a variety of educational activities. Learn more about the school projects [here](#) and don't forget to take the [Earth Day 40 Challenge](#) for individuals or groups – going on now through June 1!

Source: I Conserve Pennsylvania

GAME COMMISSION OFFERS ADVICE TO AVOID ATTRACTING BEARS

With spring well underway across the state, many Pennsylvanians are spending more time outdoors and seeing more wildlife – and signs of wildlife – in their yards and other places they frequent. Among the wildlife becoming more visible are Pennsylvania’s roughly 17,000 black bears, all of which are looking for food.

Since bears are found throughout most of the state, Mark Ternent, Pennsylvania Game Commission black bear biologist, said bear sightings are common at this time of year. Food for bears is naturally scarce in spring until green-up, which is ahead of schedule this year. But that doesn’t mean bears emerging from dens aren’t getting into trouble. After several months of hibernation, they are once again searching for food. Thus, sightings and, in some cases, conflicts are increasing.

“Now is the time to keep bears from becoming a nuisance later in the summer,” Ternent said. “Bears that wander near residential areas in search of springtime foods are less likely to stay or return if they do not find anything rewarding. Conversely, if bears find food in backyards, they quickly learn to associate food with residential areas and begin to spend more time in those areas. As a result, encounters between humans and bears, property damage and vehicle accidents involving bears may increase.”

Ternent noted capturing and moving bears that have become habituated to humans is a costly and sometimes ineffective way of addressing the problem. That is why wildlife agencies around the country tell people that a “fed bear is a dead bear.”

“The best solution is to prevent bears from finding something to eat around your house in the first place,” Ternent said. “Anything edible placed outside for any reason – whether it is food for wildlife or pets or unsecured garbage – gives bears a reason to visit your property. Homeowners should begin now to remove food sources that might attract bears.”

Ternent listed five suggestions that could prevent attracting bears to a property:

Play it smart. Do not feed wildlife. Food placed outside for wildlife, such as corn for squirrels, may attract bears. Even bird feeders can become “bear magnets.” Bear conflicts with bird feeding generally don’t arise in the winter because bears are in their winter dens. But at other times of the year, birdfeeders will attract problem bears. If you do chose to feed songbirds during the summer, Audubon Pennsylvania offers some tips, including: avoid foods that are particularly attractive for bears, such as sunflower seeds, hummingbird

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GAME COMMISSION OFFERS ADVICE TO AVOID ATTRACTING BEARS**(continued)**

nectar mixes or suet; bring feeders inside at night; or suspend feeders from high crosswires so they are at least 10 feet above the ground and four feet from anything a bear can climb, including overhead limbs.

Keep it clean. Don't put out garbage until pick-up day; don't throw table scraps out back; don't add fruit or vegetable wastes to your compost pile; and clean your barbecue grill regularly. If you have pets and feed them outdoors, consider placing food dishes inside overnight. Encourage your neighbors to do the same.

Keep your distance. If a bear shows up in your backyard, stay calm. Shout at it like you would to chase an unwanted dog. Don't approach it. If the bear won't leave, call the nearest Game Commission regional office or local police department for assistance.

Eliminate temptation. Bears that visit your area are often drawn there. Neighbors need to work together to reduce an area's appeal to bears. Ask area businesses to keep dumpsters closed and bear-proofed (chained or locked shut with a metal lid).

Check please! If your dog is barking, or cat is clawing at the door to get in, try to determine what has alarmed your pet. But do it cautiously, using outside lights to full advantage and from a safe position, such as a porch or an upstairs window. All unrecognizable outside noises and disturbances should be checked, but don't do it on foot with a flashlight. Black bears blend in too well with nighttime surroundings providing the chance for a close encounter.

Pennsylvanians also are reminded that if they see cubs alone, it does not necessarily mean they have been abandoned or orphaned.

"During the spring, sows may leave their cubs for several hours, typically up in a tree, while they forage," Ternent said. "If you encounter cubs, leave the area the way you entered it and leave the cubs alone. Staying in the vicinity prevents the mother from returning, and attempting to care for the cubs is illegal and may result in exposure to wildlife diseases or habituate the young bears to humans.

"Cubs that have been removed from the wild and habituated to people are difficult to rehabilitate for release back into the wild and may result in the cub being euthanized."

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GAME COMMISSION OFFERS ADVICE TO AVOID ATTRACTING BEARS**(continued)**

Ternent noted that, as a result of Pennsylvania's large human and bear populations, it is not uncommon for people and bears to encounter one another.

"Bears needn't be feared, nor should they be dismissed as harmless; but they should be respected," Ternent said. "In the past 10 years fewer than 20 people have been injured by bears in Pennsylvania, and there are no known records of a Pennsylvania black bear killing a human.

"Injury from a black bear is often the result of a human intentionally or unintentionally threatening a bear, its cubs, or a nearby food source, and the best reaction is to defuse the threat by leaving the area in a quiet, calm manner."

Ternent also advised:

Stay Calm. If you see a bear and it hasn't seen you, leave the area calmly. Talk or make noise while moving away to help it discover your presence. Choose a route that will not intersect with the bear if it is moving.

Get Back. If you have surprised a bear, slowly back away while talking softly. Face the bear, but avoid direct eye contact. Do not turn and run; rapid movement may be perceived as danger to a bear that is already feeling threatened. Avoid blocking the bear's only escape route and try to move away from any cubs you see or hear. Do not attempt to climb a tree. A female bear may falsely interpret this as an attempt to get at her cubs, even though the cubs may be in a different tree.

Pay Attention. If a bear is displaying signs of nervousness – pacing, swinging its head, or popping its jaws – about your presence, leave the area. Some bears may bluff charge to within a few feet. If this occurs, stand your ground, wave your arms wildly, and shout at the bear. Turning and running could elicit a chase and you cannot outrun a bear.

Fight Back. If a bear attacks, fight back as you continue to leave the area. Black bears have been driven away with rocks, sticks, binoculars, car keys, or even bare hands.

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Ohio River Sweep - June 19, 2010

River Sweep is a riverbank cleanup of the Ohio River and its tributaries. River Sweep encompasses the entire length of the river, from its origin in Pittsburgh, PA to its end in Cairo, IL, including 1,962 miles of shoreline and many tributaries.

Each year, more than 21,000 volunteers from public organizations, civic groups, recreational clubs, and the general public in six states bordering the river come together to collect more than 20,000 tons of trash and other debris from the banks of the Ohio River and tributaries.

Allegheny County Sites

Pennsyl- vania			
	Allegheny	Southside Riverfront Park	8:00 am- 12:00
		Glenwillard Boat Club	8:00 am- 12:00
		Natrona Heights	8:00 am- 12:00
		Elizabeth Riverfront Park	8:00 am- 12:00
		Nine Mile Run	8:00 am- 12:00
		West End	8:00 am- 12:00

Come on out on June 19, 2010 and give us a hand cleaning up the River Banks.

Remember, most of us get our drinking water from the 3 Rivers.

GAME COMMISSION OFFERS ADVICE TO AVOID ATTRACTING BEARS**(continued)**

“Learning about bears and being aware of their habits is a responsibility that comes with living in rural and suburban Pennsylvania or recreating in the outdoors,” Ternent said.

In 2003, a regulation prohibiting the feeding of bears went into effect. The regulation made it unlawful to intentionally “lay or place food, fruit, hay, grain, chemical, salt or other minerals that may cause bears to congregate or habituate an area.” The exceptions to this regulation are “normal or accepted farming, habitat management practices, oil and gas drilling, mining, forest management activities or other legitimate commercial or industrial practices.”

The regulation enables Game Commission Wildlife Conservation Officers (WCOs) to issue written notices that direct landowners to discontinue wildlife feeding, even if not intended for bears, including songbird feeding, if the feeding is attracting bears to the area and causing problems with bears nearby.

To report nuisance bears, contact the Game Commission Region Office nearest you. The telephone numbers are: Northwest Region Office in Franklin, Venango County, 814-432-3188; Southwest Region Office in Bolivar, Westmoreland County, 724-238-9523; Northcentral Region Office in Jersey Shore, Lycoming County, 570-398-4744; Southcentral Region Office in Huntingdon, Huntingdon County, 814-643-1831; Northeast Region Office in Dallas, Luzerne County, 570-675-1143; and Southeast Region Office in Reading, Berks County, 610-926-3136.

More information on bears is available on the agency’s website (<http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/>) by clicking on the “Wildlife” tab in the menu bar at the top of the homepage, and then selecting “Black Bears” From the “Mammals” section.

Source: PA Game Commission