

# Delaware River Basin to be tested before gas drilling starts

By: **HILARY BENTMAN** (Thu, Sep/25/2008)

Officials will spend \$25,000 to have parts of the Delaware River Basin tested before gas drilling begins in Upper Bucks, a move they say is needed to provide comparison data should drilling contaminate the waterways.

The Lower Delaware River Wild and Scenic Management Committee, a group of governmental representatives from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, voted Monday to conduct random samplings of streams, creeks and aquifers around the river.

Officials call the testing a protective measure. If the waterways were to become contaminated, they argue, the baseline, pre-drilling data could be used to make the case that drilling was the cause.

Funding for the testing will come from a National Park Service grant, and be used to check waterways in the wild and scenic corridor of the Lower Delaware, which encompasses a 39-mile section of the river from the Delaware Water Gap to Washington Crossing, as well as 28 miles of tributaries.

Officials still are deciding which waterways will be tested, but within this area are several creeks, including the Paunacussing, Rapp, Tinicum, Tohickon and tributaries of the Beaver.

The move by the wild and scenic committee follows concerns raised by several river advocacy groups and regulatory agencies that gas drilling will affect both water quantity and quality.

The committee hopes to have testing complete before any wells are drilled.

Time is a factor since Arbor Resources of Michigan and its affiliates have permits from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to drill on two properties in Nockamixon.

Gas drilling in this region once was unheard of. But new technology, including horizontal drilling, and the rise of oil and gas prices and the national call for energy independence, has made this an attractive area for prospectors.

Much attention has been focused on the Marcellus Shale, which stretches from New York to West Virginia and passes through northeastern Pennsylvania. The shale, located 5,000 to 8,000 feet below the surface, may hold trillions of cubic feet of natural gas, said the DEP.

"This could be a 30- to 50-year activity in this area," said Don Hamilton, of the National Park Service, Upper Delaware Wild & Scenic River, whose region sits in the shale.

Hamilton was on hand at Monday's meeting in Bridgeton to provide information for the Lower Delaware group.

Nockamixon does not lie within the Marcellus Shale, but its rock shares similar characteristics.

Drillers are looking at horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing to procure the gas.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, uses vast amounts of water, mixed with sand and other chemicals, injected into the ground under high pressure to create fractures in the rock and allow the oil or gas to be more easily withdrawn. The water used in this process must ultimately be treated.

Officials want drilling companies to release information about the chemicals and fluids they're using in their operations, of which about one-fourth can remain in the ground, according to the Lower Delaware River management committee.

The Delaware River Basin Commission now is requiring chemical disclosure in the Marcellus Shale.

But gas and oil companies have argued that the chemicals and ingredients they use are proprietary, or trade secrets, and are exempted by federal law.

**Hilary Bentman can be reached at 215-538-6380 or [hbentman@phillyBurbs.com](mailto:hbentman@phillyBurbs.com).**

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