

OCCA issues statement opposing natural-gas drilling

The Otsego County Conservation Association has issued a position statement opposing gas development. Its opposition is based on possible risks posed to water and air quality and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's lack of regulation of and lack of proven ability to regulate gas drilling operations.

The entire statement reads as follows:

"Otsego County Conservation Association has deliberated extensively over the impacts of natural gas exploration within New York State. Realizing development must always be weighed against impacts to the environment, ecosystems, and the greater good for humankind, the OCCA Board of Directors opposes gas development, particularly as it relates to horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing of deposits.

Gas development cannot be shown to safeguard the intrinsic qualities each and every one of us so cherish here in our immediate environment. Horizontal gas drilling within Otsego County and New York State poses serious concerns regarding its effects on water, ambient noise and air quality. Regulatory authorities, such as the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in its scope for gas drilling as proposed in its Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS), have yet to address adequately the protection of water, air and other environmental factors. This lack of regulation causes us great concern.

Rather than disturbing our lands and putting our waters at risk, OCCA believes that our county and our nation as a whole should focus on decreasing our use of fossil fuels and turning to applications of renewable energy sources."

"There was a range of opinions among our board," said OCCA president Martha Clarvoe. "Finding the wording to accurately express the common opinion of twelve people with differing views was challenging."

In 2007, OCCA executive director Erik Miller spoke to the county board of representatives and distributed information about the potential environmental hazards of gas drilling. In February, 2009, OCCA submitted nine pages of comments addressing the final scope for the DEC's draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement – a document which defines the parameters of what the DEC will and will not oversee once the SGEIS becomes final. The final scope, OCCA's comments, a map locating Otsego County properties that have signed leases with gas companies, and more information is available at the OCCA website, www.occainfo.org.

OCCA is a non-profit environmental organization, established in 1968. Its activities and programs include major water quality initiatives, volunteer recruitment for Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day, Cooperstown container recycling, publication of "Otsego Walks & Paddles," stewardship of Basswood State Forest, and organization of nature walks for the public. OCCA has been an active member of the Oneonta Susquehanna Greenway Committee and is working with many municipalities to promote sound land-use planning. For more information on OCCA, or to donate, call (607) 547-4488 or visit the website.