

“Spin, Spin, Spin”

"No Overall Effect"

These three words benignly sum up the current exploitation of our State Forests by the Marcellus Shale industry, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) in its April 2014 Shale-Gas Monitoring Report.

We disagree. The report provides a mere beginning, a "Foreward," perhaps, in determining what harm will result from shale gas extraction on our State lands.

Only one tenth of the projected wells have been drilled. Real production of the entire shale play has only begun. The impacts will increase, accumulate and broaden for decades. Lands adjacent to State Parks and Forests are and will continue to be developed, adding to the impacts on our public natural resources.

But there is no question as to what is acceptable harm -- and what is not. No impacts to our Constitutional rights are acceptable. No impacts to our public natural resources are acceptable. No impacts to our rights to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of our natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values to our environment are acceptable. What continues and will accumulate for the next decades must be minimized, mitigated and restored.

No more manipulating and skirting our laws. No more misappropriating our public trust funds. What has been done must be undone.

DCNR never should have allowed development of the Marcellus unconventional drilling on State land until the impacts were studied and evaluated. Former Governor Rendell never should have forced DCNR to lease more State Forest land beyond the 660,000 acres that were already under lease until DCNR could thoroughly evaluate the immediate and long-term effects of unconventional drilling on those lands.

DCNR knows what is acceptable and what is not. The mandate established by Article I Section 27 is clear: the DCNR Bureau of Forestry will carry out its Mission Statement by "Managing State Forests under sound ecosystem management, to retain their wild character and maintain biological diversity while providing pure water, opportunities for low density recreation, habitats for forest plants and animals, sustained yields of quality timber, and environmentally sound utilization of mineral resources."

DCNR was deprived of upholding its goal of "environmentally sound utilization of mineral resources" when its decision to issue no more leases until the industry effects could be studied was ignored.

No more leases should be allowed of our State Forest or Park resources until the current leases have been developed, and the impacts of these leases known and restored.

Let not "No Overall Effect" be premature.
Or, desperately, naive.

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