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## New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

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### **PUBLIC MEETINGS SET FOR DEVELOPING SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR HORIZONTAL DRILLING IN THE MARCELLUS SHALE Sessions in the Catskills and Southern Tier in November and December**

As a first step in analyzing the potential environmental impacts of high-volume hydraulic fracturing of horizontal wells in New York's natural gas-bearing Marcellus and Utica shale formations, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has issued a draft scoping document outlining the issues to be covered in the analysis.

In the document, DEC delineates a number of factors it has proposed to be included in the analysis. The public is invited to comment on the scope at six meetings scheduled to be held throughout the Southern Tier and Catskills in November and early December, and to submit written comments.

DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis pointed out that the purpose of the scoping meetings is to make certain the public has the opportunity to review issues to be included in the environmental review of proposed natural gas, horizontal drilling operations in the Marcellus and Utica formations.

"This is just the first step in what will be a careful process designed to look at environmental issues unique to the high-volume hydraulic fracturing of horizontal wells in these deep rock layers," Commissioner Grannis said.

The prospective region for the Marcellus and Utica shale formations has been roughly described as an area extending from Chautauqua County eastward to Greene, Ulster and Sullivan counties.

Although there is a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) covering gas and oil drilling in New York State generally, the State has determined that a Supplement to the GEIS is needed in order to address issues related to the large volumes of water required to "hydrofracture" the shale to release the gas. Among other topics, the draft scope proposes that the Supplement address water-management issues and the composition of drilling fluids added to the water to assist the fracturing process.

"Horizontal drilling is not new. Hydraulic fracturing is not new. And drilling into the Marcellus Shale is not new," Commissioner Grannis said. "But the drilling operations proposed involve all three of these elements, along with greatly increased water use. This review is designed to ensure that if the drilling goes forward, it takes place in the most environmentally responsible way possible."

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The GEIS was issued in 1992 and it covered hydraulic fracturing, a practice that has been used for more than 50 years in New York for releasing oil and gas trapped in otherwise impermeable geological strata. At the time the GEIS was developed, most drilling operations required less than 100,000 gallons of water per well for hydraulic fracturing. Because of the depth and geologic characteristics of the Marcellus Shale, greater volumes of water are necessary to tap into the gas reserves, likely more than 1 million gallons per well.

“The other major difference,” Commissioner Grannis said, “is that we are anticipating a large demand for drilling permits in parts of the state that historically have not seen much oil and gas drilling.”

While there are about 13,000 oil and gas wells operating statewide, these tend to be clustered in Western New York and the Southern Tier.

Following the public meetings, DEC will review the comments and produce the final scope, which will outline the factors that must be included in the Supplement to the GEIS. DEC hopes to complete a draft Supplement by next spring, a process that also will provide opportunities for the public to provide input.

A schedule of the public hearings will be available on DEC’s Marcellus Shale web page (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/46288.html>) and through the Environmental Notice Bulletin.

Tentatively, meetings are planned for

- Allegany (Cattaraugus County), Nov. 6.
- Bath (Steuben County), Nov. 12.
- Elmira (Chemung County), Nov. 13.
- Binghamton (Broome County), Nov. 17.
- Oneonta (Otsego County), Dec. 2.
- Loch Sheldrake (Sullivan County Community College), Dec. 4.

DEC is awaiting confirmation about times and venues with host communities; details will be announced as soon as they are confirmed.

The draft scope is available at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/47554.html>. Detailed instructions for submitting written comments are included in the scope.

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