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Gas firm seeks to pipe water to site

Pine Creek Valley residents concerned about plans

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TORBERT - Landowners with the Torbert Development Association are "gravely concerned" about a natural gas drilling company's plan to pump and pipe water from Pine Creek to a nearby gas well, possibly using up to 3 million gallons of water per day.

Anadarko E&P Co. Ltd. has an application pending with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission to pump an undetermined amount of water from Pine Creek, near West Side Road across from Torbert Village, and pipe it to drilling operation up the mountain, west of the creek.

The targeted land is part of Anadarko's lease with the state in the Tiadaghton State Forest.

The notice from the SRBC states its regulations "require that notice be sent to the owners of parcels that are adjacent to a parcel containing a project that proposes consumptive water use."

The Torbert Development Association is a group of landowners with properties along or near Pine Creek in the village, mostly west of Route 44 and along Torbert Lane in Watson Township, Lycoming County.

Anadarko also has another application to withdraw water from Pine Creek along Route 44 in Cummings Township, near the border with Watson Township.

The company actually has a half-dozen pending and four approved water withdrawal applications with the SRBC.

However, Anadarko currently only buys water from three area water authorities - Bellefonte, Jersey Shore and Montoursville - and trucks it to its various drilling sites, said Matt Carmichal, Anadarko spokesman.

"We want to find water sources as close to the operations as possible, that's best from a traffic perspective," he said. "The best option is to pipe the water where it's needed. We work with local engineering firms to find the nearest location. A lot of it has to do with the water flow associated with the creek, access potential to the creek and finding areas along the stream that we interrupt as little as possible with the public use and recreation.

"We want to minimize our impact on the local use of these creeks as much as we can."

Mary Chancellor, president of the Torbert association, said members met Thursday night and are "gravely concerned about the impact this could have on our drinking water and Pine Creek itself."

Torbert property owners all use wells for their water.

"We all recognize that there is a lot of money to be made, that there are some good things that can come from this industry in regard to energy, with new businesses and restaurants that have opened here ... it is bringing money into the community. But it can bring a great deal of damage, as well. We are all very blessed to be in this environment and we don't want it ruined.

"A gas well could pollute our water supply. Not only that, but we live on Pine Creek and we're very concerned about any environmental impact this could have. As an association, we want to go on record that we have grave concerns," she said.

The Torbert association is a housing organization formed in 1981. Prior to that there were mostly seasonal cabins, but now there are over 30 homes - most of them permanent residences - in the village nestled along the creek. The Pine Creek Rail-Trail runs along the rear of most of the Torbert properties. The proposed water pumping site is across the creek from the homes; the planned well is west, up and over the mountain.

Chancellor said not all Torbert property owners received a letter from the SRBC, causing some confusion. The letter was passed out to those who attended Thursday night's meeting.

Heavy truck traffic at the site to build a pipeline also has residents concerned.

Carmichael said Anadarko has bonds in place for all roads in Clinton and Lycoming counties that it uses.

"Safety is paramount in all our operations," he said. "We work with PennDOT and fix the roads we impact with our operations. In fact, we have spent \$10 million so far this spring repairing and improving roads in

Clinton and Lycoming counties."

According to the application with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission for the planned well site, planned activities there include the drilling, completion and testing of up to six Marcellus Shale gas wells from a single drilling pad, along mountainous Bull Run Road in Watson Township.

"If the wells are successful, they will be connected to a pipeline and placed into production. The drilling operations are expected to begin after June 2010. Drilling operations for each well will have a duration of about 30 days, during which a mobile drilling rig and support equipment will be located on the drill pad site," the application states.

After one or more wells are drilled, the rig and equipment will be removed and hydraulic fracturing equipment will be assembled on the drill pad site. The company says at least 15 days will be required to remove the drilling rig and associated equipment and to move in the fracturing equipment and the necessary water volumes. Fracturing equipment will include portable steel tanks to store the water.

Once all required equipment and water are on location, the hydraulic fracture operations will start, according to the application, with up to 10 or more frac stages per well expected. These operations generally run around the clock from start to finish and could take up to a week or more to complete.

The application states that a gas-water test separator, gas volume and rate metering equipment and steel flow lines will be installed prior to commencing flowback operations. The well will be flowed back through the production equipment and the water captured in steel tanks. Fracturing equipment will then be removed from the location.

The flowback water will be disposed of to an approved treatment facility or treated for re-use in future fracturing operations. If successful, the well will be connected to a gas transmission line and placed into production.

Carmichael said the application and the letters to nearby property owners are required by SRBC.

"We have to submit consumptive use permits with the SRBC when we drill a pad and submit an application for each of those wells," he said.

Those notified of the plan, filed May 5, can offer comments by referencing the "Notice of Intent" (NOI-2010-0357) to Eric Roof, SRBC, 1721 North Front St., Harrisburg, Pa., 17102-2391, by telephone at 1-717-238-043, ext. 209, okr email to eroof@srbc.net.

Carmichael said Anadarko has several drilling sites in operation in the region, including one along Hyner Run Road, Chapman Township, and one on the Lycoming County side of Route 44, off of Narrow Gauge Road, McHenry Township.

The Chapman Town-ship well pad actually includes two wells in active operation and four others pending.

Anadarko received approval from the SRBC to withdraw 720,000 gallons of water daily from the West Branch of the Susquehanna River near the Gold Star Mothers Bridge at Hyner to support that drilling operation. However, the Chapman Township Zoning Hearing Board denied a request from the company for a special exception to the area zoned Forest and Agricultural for the water pumping operation.

Carmichael said his firm is "still weighing all of our options" whether to appeal that decision with the Clinton County Court of Common Pleas.

He said that withdrawl site would have greatly reduced the amount of truck traffic on the roads coming from Bellefonte, Jersey Shore and Montoursville to supply water used in the hydrofracing process to extract natural gas from the Marcellus Shale well.

One option could be to use a water withdrawal site in Renovo, near the Birch Street bridge that connects Renovo and South Renovo. That may require a special zoning approval, though.

One area approved for water withdrawal is near the intersection of Route 44 and Muthler Lane, just outside of Jersey Shore

Other applications with the SRBC, awaiting approval are:

n West Branch of the Susquehanna River just off of Route 879, Burnside Township, Centre County.

n Beech Creek at Kato Road, Snow Shoe Township, Centre County.

n Wolf Run at Panther Road, Snow Shoe Township.

n Pine Creek off Route 414 near Cammal, McHenry Township, Lycoming County.

n Larry's Creek at Dam Run Road, Mifflin Township, Lycoming County.

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