pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

News for Immediate Release

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DCNR Releases First Report on Monitoring the Impacts of Shale Gas Development on State Forest

State College – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Ellen Ferretti today announced the release of the department's first Shale Gas Monitoring Report that outlines its efforts to track, detect and report on the impacts of gas development on Pennsylvania's state forest lands.

The 265-page document is available on the DCNR website at www.dcnr.state.pa.us, choose "Forestry" under "Quick Links" and then "Shale Gas Monitoring Report."

"People may have different perspectives on how monitoring is defined, but they want to know that staff is on the ground observing and managing gas development activity that is occurring in our state forests," Ferretti said. "The breadth and depth of this report demonstrates that shale gas production on state forests is being carefully managed."

Ferretti noted scientists define monitoring as repeated measurements over time to determine trends or patterns, and that trends inform management decisions.

"Monitoring does not necessarily give you answers – it gives you data to be used for decision-making," Ferretti said. "We already have and continue to make adjustments based on our observations, and our management guidelines will continually be updated as more information is brought forth."

Information in the document represents a snapshot in time through 2012. DCNR is asking its Natural Gas Advisory Committee at a meeting in State College today to provide some insight into how and when monitoring data and information should be communicated going forward.

DCNR's program monitors for a broad set of values, including: water; wildlife; plants; invasive species; incidents; air; landscapes; soils; revenue; energy; recreation; community engagement; forest health; timber products; and infrastructure.

"The intent of the report is to present information in as objective a manner as possible. Oftentimes trends or effects are not evident for years or decades. Despite that, there are some findings that can be gleaned from this initial report," Acting Deputy Secretary for Parks and Forestry Dan Devlin said.

Some insights included in the preface to the report:

- Water is the resource that most people cite when expressing their concerns about shale gas production. Although incidents have occurred, the monitoring data shows that water quality has not been affected due to this activity.

- Approximately 1,486 acres of forest has been converted through 2012 to facilitate gas development; a number that is lower as a result of a management decision to place this activity within or adjacent to existing infrastructure or existing disturbances where it is more noticeable to the public, but requires less forest disturbance.

- Invasive species are a concern as areas of disturbance tend to create conditions conducive to invasion unwanted plant species or pests. The report clearly shows that invasive species need to be carefully managed and controlled. DCNR leases require that companies address invasives.

- Recreational experiences and expectations vary by user. Some recreationists prefer solitude and a more wilderness-type experience whereas others such as motorized vehicle enthusiasts are happy with a less primitive and more developed experience. The monitoring data shows a trend from the more remote experience to a semi-primitive experience. This bears close scrutiny to ensure that a wide variety of recreational experiences are available on the state forests in the future.

In addition to information on the website, and presentations to advisory committees, DCNR will conduct an online seminar that the public can participate in on Monday, April 21, at 1:30 p.m. To participate go to https://copa.webex.com/copa/onstage/g.php?d=648806517&t=a and call toll-free (877) 668-4493.

DCNR also is collecting observations about the report through an online survey available with the report on the website landing page.

DCNR's shale gas monitoring program began full implementation in 2011 after Governor Corbett approved the hiring of a 15-member dedicated monitoring team and the department met with advisory committees, began developing monitoring protocols and building a variety of tools such as tracking and mapping databases.

Data collection and field implementation started in earnest in 2012. The department began compiling the report in 2013, with data collection ongoing today and into the future.

Oil and gas development has been a part of state forest management since 1947. Of the state's 2.2-million acre system, there are approximately 700,000 acres of state forest land available for gas development either through DCNR-issued leases or on areas where the commonwealth does not own the subsurface rights.

For more information about gas development on state forest lands, visit the DCNR website at www.dcnr.state.pa.us, and choose "Gas Drilling on State Forests" under "Quick Links."

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