

McKean County Conservation District Participates in Senate Marcellus Shale Hearing

(Harrisburg, PA) – Sandy Thompson, Manager of the McKean County Conservation District, testified yesterday at a PA Senate Majority Policy Committee hearing on the local impacts of Marcellus shale drilling.

Thompson told the Committee that in 2009 DEP decided the erosion and sedimentation control (Chapter 102) and waterways and encroachment program (Chapter 105) would no longer be implemented at the local level by conservation districts but instead by DEP. This directive included all oil and gas operations related to the exploration or extraction of gas and oil whether they were shallow or Marcellus shale. The result is that oil and gas permits are not issued locally and therefore took away the conservation districts ability to work with the industry to protect local natural resources.

Between 2000 and 2010 almost 4,200 oil and gas well permits have been issued in McKean County, making it the highest number of permits issued in any county in PA. There are over sixty-five Marcellus wells permitted in the county with twenty-four of those wells drilled.

“Extraction from the Marcellus shale formation requires considerable water use, produces high volumes of wastewater and involves substantial earth disturbance,” Thompson stated. “Water quality monitoring efforts are needed to evaluate the environmental quality of the watershed, identify actual and potential impacts to the water resources, and determine if the environmental

conditions in the watershed are supporting statewide waste uses, public health and safety, economic stability and quality of life for McKean County Residents.”

Thompson continued to say that the lack of local oversight in reviewing the erosion and sedimentation control plan, issuance of permits, and technical oversight for implementing proper best management practices illustrates one example of what McKean County lost when DEP took away the conservation districts responsibilities with the oil and gas industry. “The industry lost technical expertise, DEP lost a partner to work toward the protection of our resources, and the environment lost the local control needed for its protection,” Thompson stated. She concluded, “In the future there must be collaboration between DEP, conservation districts and the oil and gas industry to balance the energy needs with the protection and preservation of our natural resources.”

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The McKean County Conservation District is a subdivision of state government that was created by state law to promote the protection, maintenance, improvement and wise use of the land, water and other related resources within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.