

County of Lycoming Community Gas Exploration Task Force

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MEDIA RELEASE

Lycoming County establishes gas exploration task force

The Board of Commissioners for the County of Lycoming and the Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce has collaborated to form a Community Gas Exploration Task Force. The group's organizational meeting occurred on May 15th.

Over the past several months, a number of gas companies have established a major presence in Lycoming County to arrange leases with County landowners. Lycoming County is located astride a geologic formation known as the Marcellus Shale, which stretches across a large segment of northern and western Pennsylvania, continuing into several neighboring states.

Geologists have concluded the Marcellus Shale contains vast quantities of natural gas reserves, perhaps more than 500 trillion cubic feet, which modern drilling methods now allow energy firms to extract.

Board of Commissioners' Chairperson, Rebecca A. Burke, noted, "the economic impact of gas exploration will have a significant effect upon the County, its residents, local government and our business community. The task force's mission will be to identify key issues, research facts and information, and review and propose public policy regarding gas exploration. This significant economic development initiative may result in many very positive results for our local economy and we have a responsibility to work with local officials, landowners, and the gas exploration companies to ensure the many assets of our area are preserved while supporting the positive efforts being advanced.

“Too, the task force will serve as a clearinghouse to respond to questions by public officials, landowners, businesses and private citizens and to provide timely, credible information regarding the positive, economic impact of Marcellus Shale in Lycoming County,” Burke added.

Task force members and their respective area of focus are: Rebecca Burke, County Government; Jeff Bower and Brent M. Fish, Real Estate; Kurt Hausammann, Jr., Planning; Craig Konkle, Public Safety; Vince Matteo, Economic Development; Mark Murawski, Transportation; Doug Shangraw, Finance; Dan Vilello, (Regulatory Agencies) and Paul Wentzler, Local Government. Commissioner Burke will serve as task force chairperson. The Chamber and the County each volunteered a support staff member.

“The task force composition was determined based upon an early assessment of the key issues identified through research by Penn State Cooperative Extension,” said Dr. Vince Matteo, President of the Williamsport-Lycoming Chamber of Commerce. “We invited eight individuals who possessed the skill-sets we believed would be needed. During the organizational meeting we identified two other individuals with expertise to be added as task force members, along with several adjunct members who will serve on-call. Too, as we get higher up on the learning curve, we may see the need to add other skills.”

Dr. Timothy Kelsey, an Agricultural Economist with Penn State Cooperative Extension pointed out that, “good indications of the potential effects can be learned by studying the experience in the Barnett Shale region of north Texas. The Barnett Shale play is very similar in geology to the Marcellus, so [it] is a good comparison of technological and industry needs. In addition, since the development of the Barnett Shale started in earnest in 2001, employment and income impacts can be documented.”

“The task force definitely will be traveling to Texas to meet with our counterparts,” said task force chair, Rebecca Burke. Right now, we have a lot of homework to do to get ourselves up-to-speed on the issues, to identify the most knowledgeable points of contact with whom to meet while we’re in Texas and to develop our lists of questions to ask them.” In its preparation, the task force also will be seeking expertise from counties in western Pennsylvania, where gas exploration has been occurring for nearly a year.

Dr. Matteo pointed out that, “by late summer, the task force plans to share the information it has learned with various organizations and focus groups through public meetings.”



Members of the Community Gas Exploration Task Force discussing direction on the first meeting held May 20, 2008.