

PA Environment Digest

An Update On Environmental Issues In PA

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Additional Gas Leasing In State Forests Sparks Debate This Week

Gov. Corbett's proposal for additional non-surface impact [leasing of additional natural gas rights](#) under State Forests and Parks this week generated an exchange of views in the Harrisburg Patriot-News between Rick Carlson, former Director of DCNR's Office of Policy under Governors Ridge and Rendell and the Gov. Corbett's Energy Executive Patrick Henderson.

Here is the text of both Carlson's op-ed from the Patriot and Henderson's response--

Op-Ed: Corbett Proposal Misses The Point Of Drilling Moratorium

By Rick Carlson

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Ellen Ferretti's recent comments clearly implied Gov. Tom Corbett's budget proposal would aid public land stewardship with two initiatives.

The first would lift the current moratorium on new gas leasing in our state parks and forests where there would be no surface impacts.

As the budget hearing in Harrisburg last week demonstrated, the current administration has failed to understand the full intent of the current moratorium developed under former Gov. Ed Rendell.

Specifically, the moratorium recognized the importance of protecting surface and groundwater, and the result was DCNR initiating a large scale water monitoring and evaluation program before new areas would be leased for drilling.

Surely the administration understands being a responsible steward dictates that we not lift the current moratorium until DCNR's water monitoring and evaluation has assured us that both surface and groundwater quality are not being threatened by the extensive drilling and fracking currently underway on existing leased sites.

Instead, we are to be fooled into believing that leasing new forest land will be OK as long as we

don't see any surface disturbances...shame on them.

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Evidently, the Administration has already decided they want to move forward without having provided the public with any of the surface and ground water information that DCNR has been collecting for the past three years.

There has been no public oversight to date in the development of the monitoring plan and no public review of the agency's evaluation methodology.

It's long past time for Secretary Ferretti to lay out the specifics of DCNR's water monitoring program, when the initial effort is to be completed, how it will continue, and how they intend to involve the public in the review of this information both now and in the future.

The exceptional value of the surface and groundwater resources in our state Parks and forests demand nothing less.

The second initiative is nothing more than a slight of hand that would fool us into believing that Gov. Corbett is making a huge new financial investment in our parks and forests when in fact about 75 percent of the money is largely being reshuffled from existing conservation accounts. While Secretary Ferretti touts the benefits of this "Enhance Penn's Woods" initiative, what she doesn't say is that Gov. Corbett is again proposing to gut the Department's Oil and Gas Fund and divert the money for other purposes.

This fund was proposed by Secretary Goddard nearly 60 years ago to take revenue from the sale of minerals on state lands and reinvest that money in land and conservation infrastructure that would provide long lasting benefits for all of our citizens to enjoy.

However, once the Marcellus gas revenues started to produce big money, the Oil and Gas Fund has essentially been looted to address other funding needs.

What Ferretti doesn't say in her commentary is that the administration has taken most of DCNR's general fund monies that historically funded the operation and staffing of our Parks and Forests, diverted them to other purposes, and has tapped the Oil and Gas Fund to replace the diverted funds.

This means the Oil and Gas Funds now supporting the daily operations of Parks and Forests are lost for those conservation investments to buy land and build facilities benefiting our Parks and Forests.

The magnitude of this loss under Gov. Corbett is staggering...over \$350 million and now this Administration wants to lift the moratorium for more leasing so they can transfer another \$75 million to address other purposes...shame on them.

Part of any cabinet secretary's job is to support the administration's budget. But this just doesn't add up, and by any measure, conservation is the loser. It's time to end this Tom Foolery, and if we don't push our elected leaders to get serious about improving the stewardship of our public lands, then shame on us.

And if the Secretary wants to invoke the historic efforts of Maurice Goddard in her commentary, then she should work harder to preserve one of Goddard's greatest conservation achievements and speak about the importance of using the Oil and Gas Fund to put in place a permanent conservation legacy that will endure long after the Marcellus gas revenue is gone.

Rick Carlson, of Harrisburg, served as a policy director of the Department of Conservation of Natural Resources under former Govs. Tom Ridge and Ed Rendell.

Response By Patrick Henderson, Gov. Corbett's Energy Executive

Dear Editor:

I write in response to Rick Carlson's recent piece (Corbett proposal misses the point of drilling moratorium) which contains factually inaccurate and out-of-context information for your readers. Simply put, Governor Corbett's proposed budget gives DCNR additional funds to do its job better, while at the same time helps the commonwealth generate revenue to meet critical priorities in a way that prohibits new well pads, pipelines and roads on new areas in state parks and forests. Now let's look at the facts.

Mr. Carlson says that the governor's current proposal "misses the point" of the Rendell moratorium, which was intended to, among other things, protect surface and groundwater from impacts from drilling activity. Never mind that DCNR officials expressed in late 2010 that the Rendell administration wrote the existing moratorium too narrowly, because it prohibited the very type of projects now under consideration. Mr. Carlson's newfound position seems to contrast his advice from February 2011, when he urged the governor to maintain the moratorium for a while until new environmental protections were put in place.

So let's look at what Governor Corbett has done since Mr. Carlson's advice. First, he has not leased – and will not lease – a single acre of state forest or park land which will result in new or additional activity on these public lands. Second, he proposed, championed, and signed into law the most sweeping enhancement of Pennsylvania's environmental laws in nearly thirty years. These enhancements include new protections for ground and surface water, well construction; mandatory inspections on drilling sites; disclosure of chemicals used; and significantly expanded setback distances between waterways, water wells and drilling activity. This includes a new 1,000 foot buffer between drilling and all public drinking water supplies.

The revenues from any new activity from adjacent lands or existing and already authorized pads would allow for historic state investments in education funding, health care and other critical needs, while allocating future royalties for state park and forest improvements.

Mr. Carlson also misrepresents the governor's Enhance Penn's Woods initiative. This proposal will allocate \$211 million to state park and forestry infrastructure over two years, by investing over \$100 million in new money while more strategically targeting existing dollars to provide the improvements our park and forest visitors deserve. Governor Corbett's initiative represents the largest infusion of money into state park and forest infrastructure in Pennsylvania's history. This investment will allow DCNR to add nearly 20,000 new acres to our park and forest system, on top of the 8,000 acres already added under Governor Corbett.

Finally, Mr. Carlson is simply wrong with respect to the budget. For three years under Governor Corbett, oil and gas lease royalties have only been utilized to help operate our state park and forest system, as well as environmental grant programs such as Growing Greener. Contrast that to the prior Administration under which Mr. Carlson served, where \$240 million was transferred out of the agency to the general fund.

Mr. Carlson is entitled to his own opinions – even if his current views contradict the advice he gave the governor in 2011. But no one is entitled to their own facts.

NewsClips:

[Vitali Demands Documents Behind Corbett Drilling Plan](#)

[Corbett Energy Executive Calls Vitali Drilling Comments Irresponsible](#)
[Op-Ed: Corbett Drilling Proposal Misses The Point Of Moratorium](#)