Protect Our Parks delivered signatures from residents in two-thirds of the county's municipalities, petitioning Allegheny County Council to adopt a “wait and see” approach toward future fracking at County parks. The proposed Ordinance calls for a two-year evaluation period, after gas is produced from the lease at Deer Lakes Park; and it prohibits any negotiation or solicitation on further leasing until Council receives a full public report on the environmental and economic experience of this first leasing decision.

As soon as the County Solicitor validates the petitions, POP's Ordinance will be placed on Council's agenda. But the County Executive, Rich Fitzgerald, has already threatened to veto the legislation, even though it merely formalizes his own public assurances about any plans for further fracking on public land.

HARRISBURG: Two weeks after Election Day, demonstrators under the banner of “Pennsylvanians Against Fracking” came to the State Capitol. Their rally, for a “clean up Pennsylvania” campaign, was aimed at Gov-elect Tom Wolf and the state legislature. About 150 people turned out, in a coalition of groups which included Marcellus Protest and Protect Our Parks. The response from our end of the state was coordinated by Marcellus Outreach Butler, and other local groups supporting the event include Friends of the Harned and SHAADD (South Hills Area Against Dangerous Drilling). Among the other members are Cleanwater Action, Food and Water Watch, the Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Committee, and Thomas Merton Center.

The ‘clean up Pennsylvania’ campaign used the tag-line “Filthy energy makes for filthy government.”

In other news, State Impact Pennsylvania (affiliated with National Public Radio) covered a report from Common Cause showing that the gas industry has spent more than $50 million to influence Pennsylvania’s elected officials since 2007. The same story predicts that Mr. Wolf will have a fight on his hands to accomplish even his proposed 5% “severance tax” on frackers — let alone any true protection for the state’s environment.

The incoming legislature is controlled by Republican recipients of gas industry money: Returning as Senate President Pro Tem, Joseph Scarnatti was second only to Tom Corbett in pulling down industry cash. On the other side of the Capitol, the Speaker and the Majority Leader of the House are also coming into office with a big boost from the gas industry. Common Cause notes that its dollar totals are conservative because they include only those individuals and PACs at the very top of the gas industry “food chain,” but not the suppliers and subcontractors in other fracking-dependent businesses.

Earlier, as reported in the Tribune Review, Mr. Corbett’s “energy policy czar” had dismissed these reports on campaign finance, charging that the numbers were compiled by people “… fundamentally opposed to gas drilling.” Other leading recipients of industry money included Sen. Tim Solobay (D-Washington County) and Demoncratic candidate for governor (in 2010) Dan Onorato.
Shalefield Stories: Making it Real

The “Shalefield Stories” has been filling a double purpose for our movement. First, it’s a fund-raiser for helping “the harmed” — those who are bearing the first-hand impacts of toxic fracking. At a suggested donation of $5 per copy, proceeds from the book pay for drinking water and air purifiers for our neighbors who wait for justice from the courts and corporations.

Their needs are large, and growing as fracking spreads; this sort of help—one family at a time—can only scratch the surface. But while we’re working for sane social policies, we realize that—moment by moment—air and water make the difference between life or death for each of us, and for all creatures.

Equally important, “Shalefield Stories” is a unique resource for advocacy and education, in our own region and beyond. (When Members of Parliament visited Pennsylvania from the Netherlands, they wanted to hear from local residents who’d been affected by fracking. The MPs took copies of “Shalefield Stories” home to share with their colleagues.)

Thanks to the “Friends of the Harmed” who collected and edited the stories, and whose volunteer labor puts the proceeds to work for those in need. Their hands-on caring also creates opportunities for faith communities, academics and others to put their own skills and gifts to use.

We’ll be featuring some of the Shalefield Stories in future editions of this newsletter. Meanwhile, you can make a donation at www.friendsoftheharmed.com.

Updated information on these topics (with links to original sources), along with our calendar of upcoming events, and other resources, can be found at www.marcellusprotest.org.