Range Resources Lease Passes County Council: Protect Our Parks isn’t Quitting

PITTSBURGH: The final vote wasn’t a surprise: 9-5-1. Tom Baker (R-District 1) had declared his “Yes” vote before the meeting began; and that could only mean that Ed Kress (R-3) would also be voting in favor. Opponents Barbara Daly Danko (D-11), Heather Heidelbaugh (R-at large), Sue Means (R-5), and William Russell Robinson (D-10) had delivered their verdicts in impassioned language before the vote was called.

Jan Rae (R-District 2) had made her opposition known long before the May 6 meeting, and Amanda Green Hawkins (D-13) was committed to abstention (effectively a “No,” since passage required eight affirmative “Yes” votes).

So the leasing loyalists, having quashed any attempt at “due diligence,” were merely waiting impatiently to cast their votes the County Executive’s way: Jim Ellenbogen (D-12), Michael Finnerty (D-4), Nick Futules (D-7), Dr. Chuck Martoni (D-8), Bob Macey (D-9) and President John DeFazio (D-at large) left no daylight at all between their positions and Mr. Fitzgerald’s, while John Palmiere (D-6) shadow-boxed publically with his conscience before adding the ninth, superfluous, “Aye”.

Climate change: “No”; Fracking: “Yes”?

PITTSBURGH: The editorial page of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette stands in the front ranks of our local civic boosters of fracking. Its endorsement of the Deer Lakes Park drilling lease—before the lease document had even been seen—is only one of the most recent examples.

At the same time, the paper’s would-be molders of public opinion have called for ‘regulators’ [whoever they are] to ‘be vigilant’ about deadly highway frack traffic, and for ‘people’ [whoever they are] to ‘muster the political will’ to do something about climate change. [See a related story on p.2]

The folks at “One of America’s Great Newspapers” seem to believe that hand-wringing is less offensive to their paying advertisers than real journalism might be. But we still hope that the Post-Gazette may take some responsibility for ‘vigilance’ and ‘political will’ upon itself. Somewhere in the PG’s ‘morgue’ of back issues should be old copies of the former Pgh. Press, including Walt Kelly’s 1970 cartoon where Pogo says “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” It’s still true.
Natural Gas and Climate Change

By Bernie Fischlowitz-Roberts

Earlier this year, the world reached 400 parts per million (ppm) of CO₂ in the atmosphere. James Hansen, NASA’s former chief climate scientist, has said: “If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted... CO₂ will need to be reduced...to at most 350 ppm.”

Many of the world’s governments have given lip service to the notion of limiting warming to 2°C. This would not return atmospheric CO₂ to 350 ppm, but it would give humanity a chance of avoiding utter catastrophe. To reach even that goal requires leaving at least 80% of known fossil fuel reserves in the ground, and out of world markets.

In the past few years, natural gas (NG) has been displacing coal for electric power generation in the U.S. Conventional wisdom has argued that this shift in fuels protects the climate, since NG produces less CO₂ emissions than coal, per unit of energy. But now that analysis is more complicated as NG is comes largely from fracking and horizontal drilling. Recent studies show that the climate impact from both shale gas and traditional NG can actually exceed those of oil or coal, primarily due to previously underestimated methane emissions.

These findings imply, first, that the notion of NG as a “bridge fuel” to a low-carbon future is dubious at best. Second, they highlight the economic, as well as ecological impact of investing in NG extraction and usage. NG’s insatiable demand for capital hinders job creation by displacing investment away from more labor-intensive, renewable sources of energy.

And, third, since the physics of our climate system respond more quickly to methane and other shorter-lived emissions (such as black carbon) than to CO₂, our immediate efforts to reduce methane emissions must be as high a priority as longer-range reductions in CO₂.

[Note: This article is adapted from a more complete treatment, with source notes, available on our website.]

• What’s it worth? An analysis of the Deer Lakes Park deal, by Protect Our Parks, shows that Allegheny County’s entire royalty revenue, over the life of the lease, would allow a one-time tax reduction for a typical home-owner of just $50.

• News from the EIA: The Energy Information Agency (“official” publisher of US government statistics and forecasts on energy) has a new public spokesman. Per Steve Horn’s DeSmog Blog, it’s John Krohn, former mouthpiece of the fracking industry at Energy in Depth. (EIA falls under the Secretary of Energy, Dr. Ernest Moriz, who established a top-tier “frackademic” institute at MIT.) The EIA recently recanted a prior estimate on the potential of California’s Monterey Shale, which it now admits it had overstated by twenty-five times.

• Can CSSD be sustained? The new director of the so-called Center for Sustainable Shale Development admits that CSSD is no longer funded by the Heinz Foundations. The high-profile launch of CSSD in 2013 led to the resignations of top Foundation staff and a tacit but clear repudiation from the Heinz family.

• Here it Comes! The Allegheny County Health Department hosted an academic program “Preparing for Climate Change,” but smothered discussion of any actions against exacerbating it.

A Range of Resources

Please check out our ‘Resources’ page at www.marcellusprotest.org/resources, and follow us on Facebook (MarcellusProtest) and Twitter (@Marcellus_SWPA). Here is a sampling of our recent recommendations:

FriendsOfTheHarmed.com: Testimonials of individuals and families who have been harmed in the rush to drill for shale oil and gas. (Also available in a hard-copy book, sold as a fund-raiser to directly benefit those in need of help.)

The Dark Mountain Project: Not for the faint-hearted. A network of writers, artists and thinkers who believe that literature and art are failing to respond honestly to the crisis of our times, and who see a crucial role for the arts in coming to terms with a reality of impending collapse. Its founding manifesto is titled “Uncivilisation.”

Upcoming Events in June:

June 8 (Pittsburgh, Shadyside), 5:00-9:00 pm: Family-friendly acoustic music and fun, benefit for Protect Our Parks at Shadyside Nursery, 510 Maryland Ave., sponsored by “Weather Permitting.”

June 21 (Slippery Rock University, PA), all day: 2nd annual Fossil-free Energy Fair. Learn more about renewable energy through speakers, vendors, music and entertainment. Admission is free; sponsored by Marcellus Outreach Butler and Slippery Rock University Sustainable Enterprise Accelerator.

(Updated details and a more extensive list of events at www.marcellusprotest.org/event_calendar.)

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.