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Bradford County Commissioners' Office

4/9/09

For Immediate Release

## Counties Oppose Recent Action by D.E.P. to Eliminate Permits Issued by Local Conservation Districts

On April 1, 2009 Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection, (D.E.P.), eliminated local conservation districts from the permit process of Erosion and Sedimentation and Stream and Wetlands in relation to the natural gas industry.

District 7 of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (C.C.A.P.), which is comprised of Bradford, Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Wayne and Wyoming counties, opposes the decision by D.E.P. As county commissioners we believe local conservation districts are the best qualified to receive, manage and issue these permits. By retaining some local control we believe that our residents and the industry are better served.

There are several aspects of the D.E.P.'s decision county's are concerned with; D.E.P. has not sought comment about their new process from the public, conservation districts or local government officials, nor is D.E.P currently trained or staffed to manage and issue these permits in a responsible manner. This change will also eliminate municipal notices of drilling activity.

Across our counties there have been many cases where landowners and industry were well served by the conservation district's experience and local knowledge which D.E.P. does not currently possess. Susquehanna County Commissioner Mary Ann Warren stated "I've witnessed the delay of D.E.P. regarding permitting questions which causes the postponement of projects that are time sensitive; and industry, local governments and organizations that become frustrated."

Conservation districts have been able to avoid potential landowner disputes regarding such things as pipeline or road placement. For decades they have issued permits and done their jobs to take into account erosion, sedimentation, streams and wetlands which these permits are meant to protect. It appears it is the intention of D.E.P to engage in nothing more than a fast track approach to permitting pipelines and drilling sites.

C.C.A.P. District 7 Representative and Bradford County Commissioner Chairman Mark Smith stated "our conservation districts are respected among our local citizens. Conservation district employees are members of our local communities. They carry with them the dedication, pride and knowledge to do the work with the best interests of their residents in mind. They have experience beyond D.E.P. in issuing these permits; they have done them for decades."

In an effort to urge D.E.P. to re-consider their decision in this matter District 7 counties have written individual letters to acting D.E.P. Secretary John Hanger.

Awaiting response, Sullivan County Commissioner Betty Reibson stated “For the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to eliminate the conservation districts responsibilities of permitting the gas industry without public notice or comments is unacceptable to the environment and the citizens of Pa. Also for D.E.P. to ignore its own environmental values by initiating an expedited permit application is unbelievable.”

“This is not the way state agencies, county agencies or government should do business. It should be done with open dialogue, clear interest and understanding; direction must be agreed upon. That is a measure of service, to the public, it is called cooperation.” Tioga County Commissioner Chairman, Erik Coolidge said.

As counties come together in the northeastern part of the state we hope Secretary Hanger and D.E.P. will take our collective concerns seriously. “We are as concerned with the way this action was taken as we are with the potential effects this action will have on our landscapes and waterways”, added Monroe County Commissioners.

As local government officials we see first-hand the necessity of these permits to be handled at the local level. As the natural gas industry moves into our local areas, nothing could be more important to our local communities than retaining some form of local permitting process. We are asking D.E.P. to return the long held responsibilities of the conservations districts back to where they belong.