



**Testimony of:
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**New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Hearing on the
Revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement Governing Natural
Gas Drilling**

November 30, 2011

Thank you to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (“DEC”) for giving Riverkeeper an opportunity to present comments on the revised draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (“SGEIS”), the document that it has prepared to guide shale gas extraction by means of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing or “hydrofracking” in New York.

Riverkeeper is a member-supported watchdog organization whose mission includes safeguarding the environmental, recreational and commercial integrity of the watershed that provides New York City its drinking water. Riverkeeper is actively involved in advocacy and public education surrounding the issue of shale gas extraction via horizontal drilling and hydrofracking, in particular because of its potential impacts on New York’s water supply.

DEC committed, in its final, 2009 Scope governing preparation of the SGEIS, to evaluate both the potential positive and **negative** impacts to community character that could result from drilling and high-volume hydrofracking in the Marcellus Shale, which include altered land use patterns, increased traffic and need for public services, and effects on other land uses such as agriculture and tourism. DEC completely failed to fulfill this commitment in the 2011 SGEIS. DEC made no effort to quantify the potential costs of fracking on New York’s economy and local communities, an omission that fundamentally flaws DEC’s environmental impact analysis. For the SGEIS to pass legal muster, DEC must redo this aspect of the impact study to take a hard look at fracking’s potential adverse socioeconomic impacts.

Specific areas of concern include:

- The impact statement contains no estimate of costs to communities associated with increased demand for community social services, police and fire departments, first responders, local hospitals, etc. Similarly, how our governments are to deal with the hundreds of millions of dollars in annual road costs that fracking will bring is not explained.
- The impact statement ignores the potential negative impact to agriculture from land and water contamination risks.
- Potential negative impacts on tourism – one of New York’s most important industries - are similarly dismissed without any serious consideration in the impact statement.

In a particularly glaring example of the deficiencies of the DEC’s socioeconomic analysis, the SGEIS summarily dismisses potential risks to tourism in a single sentence. A one-sentence statement that fracking will not harm tourism is no substitute for the hard look this issue deserves. DEC is playing Russian Roulette with one of our state’s most valuable economic sectors if it does not come to grips with the risks identified by groups like the Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board, whose recent report on the potential impacts of hydrofracking on the tourism economy of the Southern Tier warns that the expansion of gas exploration through hydrofracking:

“threatens to do serious damage to the tourism sector by degrading visitor experiences and creating an industrial landscape that far outlives the profitability of gas extraction.”¹

There are a growing number of examples of recognized social and economic damage resulting from hydrofracking in other states. We have learned from Pennsylvania that industry will not cover all of its costs -- hydrofracking will require tax dollars to repair damage to local roads and to pay the various state and local agencies charged with permitting and monitoring this industrial activity. Most of the taxpayers and communities asked to foot these bills will receive no direct money from hydrofracking activities. Because of this apparent and potentially

¹http://www.stcplanning.org/usr/Program_Areas/Energy/Naturalgas_Resources/STC_Rumbach_MarcellusTourismFinal.pdf, Page 10.

significant gap between the likely costs and possible revenues associated with hydrofracking, DEC must take the time to conduct a thorough economic analysis and provide this information to public.

On November 3, 2011, Riverkeeper wrote to Commissioner Martens to point out this fatal deficiency in the SGEIS and to call on DEC to redo its flawed socioeconomic analysis and make it available to the public before closing the comment period on December 12. We have received no response to our letter.

Riverkeeper now again urges DEC to correct this glaring omission in its socioeconomic assessment by disclosing fracking's potential costs to New York's economy and local communities. It must then provide a full opportunity for public comment on this and all other aspects of the SGEIS on fracking by holding the comment period open until sixty days after a complete socioeconomic analysis is made available to the public. Until DEC does this, it is impossible for New York taxpayers to judge whether opening the door to hydrofracking in New York will be a true benefit or a socioeconomic disaster. If DEC fails to bring its SGEIS into compliance with the requirements of state law (SEQRA) by preparing and sharing with the public a full and fair analysis of the potential adverse community and socioeconomic impacts of fracking, Riverkeeper is prepared to go to court to ensure that this requirement is met. This is the only way that an informed decision can be made about whether allowing hydrofracking to go forward in this state makes any short or long term economic sense for New York communities and taxpayers. DEC and the Governor owe the people of New York such an informed decision.