



*Preserving and protecting our precious freshwater*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Property Owners Organizing Against Conservancy District

The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) Board Meeting held last Friday, April 18, 2014, provided another stunning example of how the conservancy district is allowed to tax property owners in the district without accountability to respond to their concerns, represent their best interests and “conserve.” The MWCD is a large political subdivision in the State of Ohio created in the 1930’s for flood control and other public interest protections. This mandate to operate for “public benefit” was the basis of the 2005 amendment to the District’s “Official Plan” that justified the implementation of additional property taxes in the district. These taxes were reduced at last Friday’s Board Meeting, but the meager savings to property owners in no way would compensate them for the potential long-term damage done by the Board’s ongoing decisions to support the abnormally dangerous, resource-intensive and highly unregulated industrial process of horizontal fracturing (fracking).

On Friday, the Board of the MWCD ratified the administration’s recommendation to sign a lease to Antero Resources to lease a fourth reservoir in the district, Piedmont, for fracking. The district will receive another windfall profit of over \$94 million just in signing bonus, plus 20% royalty. In addition, the MWCD ratified three additional, renewable, “short-term” sales of water from the district of up to 120 million gallons that would provide additional profits of almost \$700,000.

In recognition of this, and left with no other recourse due to continued failed attempts to influence the MWCD otherwise, the FreshWater Accountability Project (FWAP) is connecting property owners with information and other experts in the field to protect themselves and their property. Property owners in the district near reservoirs such as Piedmont that have been leased are urged to obtain baseline water testing for their drinking water wells from a lab certified by the OEPA for Tier 3 testing. It’s an additional cost, but property owners may also want to test for radioactivity because of the water soluble Radium 226 and 228 and other toxins such as arsenic which are brought to the surface due to fracking. Those who are concerned about air contamination by being downwind from fracking and flaring may want to obtain air quality measurement canisters by contacting FWAP or researchers at FracTracker who are currently seeking opportunities to work with communities to understand air quality impacts of fracking emissions. Property owners, especially those who are lessees of the MWCD, are urged to obtain professional baseline appraisals for property values. “By engaging in an industry that negatively impacts property values and denies responsibility for pollution it causes by arguing ‘plausible deniability’, it is now up to the property owners to protect themselves,” stated Lea Harper. “Lack of adequate regulations and industry oversight along with the conservancy’s unquestioning support and promotion of fracking has put us in this unfortunate situation. We believe that property owners should bill the MWCD for their costs to obtain this baseline information because it would not be necessary if not for the MWCD’s reckless and irresponsible decisions to promote fracking in the district.”

It’s not only pollution problems and property devaluation that are of concern; there is growing awareness of the long-term implications of permanently removing large quantities of water from the watershed. The increasing rate of freshwater loss caused by the MWCD’s decision to provide the fracking industry with water from watershed reservoirs means that non-trivial impacts to water quality and quantity will occur. According to Ted Auch of FracTracker: "Even with a preliminary analysis of data, it appears the decision



to sell such massive quantities of water needed to frack each well unleashes supply/demand-side trends which will harm the hydrological and ecosystem integrity of the watershed. Ohio's Utica wells consume on average 5.2 million gallons per frack and this number is increasing by 206-240,000 gallons per well per quarter. The number of wells drilled is also increasing. Presently, the horizontal fracking industry consumes 8% of annual residential water usage in Ohio. The industry allocates less than .27% of total well pad costs for water, which is one of Ohio's most valuable natural resource. Selling massive quantities of water at cut-rate prices basically subsidizes the true cost of fracking. The MWCD is charged with stewarding public resources for future environmental and economic benefit but is instead threatening the fundamental qualities that make the conservancy district attractive and viable for future long-term growth, prosperity and development."

The MWCD labels the one-time consumptive use of water for fracking as "short-term" water sales, although the contracts are renewable and will result in long-term loss of hundreds of millions of gallons of water from the Muskingum Watershed. "What is so reprehensible about this destruction of water for profit is that the MWCD twists terms and makes broad interpretation of statutes in order to avoid necessary environmental assessments and accountability through the existing loose regulations," continued Lea Harper. "The MWCD must believe the public is gullible when it makes weak assurances that water sales can be stopped when the watershed is negatively impacted. We know that when that happens, it's too late. The MWCD will not be able to replace the water it sold that is gone forever from the watershed. This could pose great hardship in the area, especially in case of drought, which is predicted. Already other areas in the country are feeling the detrimental impacts of water loss due to fracking. Looks like Southeast Ohio could very well be next."

There are obvious reasons to be concerned about the industry's rapid growth in Ohio. The fracking industry was given special exemptions to important Federal regulations in 2005 Energy Policy Act that allowed it to move forward profitably with little liability for damage to public health and the environment. These exemptions are referred to as the, "Halliburton loophole," for the special accommodations given the industry by the Bush/Cheney administration.

Another serious concern is the risk of investments into gas and oil drilling companies identified by sources such as Energy Policy Forum and the North American Securities Administrators Association (NASAA). Horizontally fractured wells are known to rapidly deplete in production after initial reserves are tapped. Companies such as Antero Resources admit that it may be under insured for the potential costs that could be incurred due to the nature of industry. Antero has also recently reported disappointing drilling results in the Utica shale play. "What is really unfortunate is that the drillers will eventually leave the area, and some could even go quickly out of business before then. That means the MWCD will be left for any environmental cleanup costs imposed or class action lawsuits due to damages incurred," observed Lea Harper. "We know what happens in the boom/bust cycle of fossil fuel extraction. Already there are costs to us and them because of lawsuits, and there will be more. We have put the MWCD on notice that they cannot expect to tax us even more on down the line to pay for their short-term profiteering at our long-term expense. The MWCD is killing the golden goose – our clean air and water – for a temporary, toxic industry. It doesn't make sense."

For those who would like more information, Coshocton Environmental Community Awareness, Inc. is sponsoring a regional information event about horizontal fracking entitled, "Living on the Shale." The event will be held at the Coshocton Village Inn on Saturday, May 17, from 10 am until 6 pm. More information can be found at <http://www.cecaware.org/>. For MWCD property owners who would like to organize to learn more and protect themselves, please log on to [www.fwap.org](http://www.fwap.org) and contact us. Information on watershed impacts can be found at [www.fracktracker.org](http://www.fracktracker.org).

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