

Savage River Watershed Association, Inc.

PO Box 355, Frostburg, MD 21532
301-689-7156 SRWAdirector@gmail.com



House Environmental Matters Committee

HB 852 - The Marcellus Shale Safe Drilling Act of 2011

Position: Favorable With Amendments

February 23, 2011

The Savage River Watershed Association (SRWA) asks that you vote in favor of House Bill 852 as amended by the sponsor. At a time when states and nations are finding themselves fighting over access to clean water and facing water shortages, Maryland must not risk this precious natural resource, so basic to the survival of our citizens and environment. When government scientists are calling for more research before Marcellus Shale natural gas drilling proceeds, Maryland must proceed cautiously to protect the health of our people and our environment.

There is currently little data on aquifer hydraulic properties or stream flow in western Maryland. In addition there has also been no systematic study of groundwater quality in Garrett or Allegany county. It's obvious that we need to know more about the quality and quantity of our wells, streams and springs before drilling begins, as well as during and after drilling has occurred, to establish any cause-effect relationship. Rigorous data on the potential impacts of shale gas drilling and production on water resources, air quality, and ecosystems is also needed. Isn't it well-worth waiting for the outcome of such research if it translates into better safeguards for Maryland's water resources and the health of our citizens and environment? In addition, sufficient information is not yet available to determine whether drilling gas in Marcellus Shale can be made compatible with the natural resources that conservation easements are designed to preserve. If time is needed to determine the potential impacts to natural resources from drilling on conserved lands, why wouldn't time be needed to ensure adequate protection for the natural resources on all lands in Maryland?

The Savage River Watershed Association (SRWA) respects private property rights. Unfortunately, the many problems associated with Marcellus Shale natural gas extraction do not respect property boundaries. Whether one has signed a lease or not, our entire community and environment will be forced to bare the brunt of potential impacts. Why take such risks when the likelihood of negative impacts could be significantly reduced through additional research, proper planning, well-developed safeguards, and stringent regulations?

As Maryland's premier brook trout fishery, the Savage River has been identified as a conservation priority because it is one of the few watersheds that still contain intact populations of native brook trout in Maryland. The main reason for these high quality streams is that 82% of this watershed is forested (more than half of this forested area is MD State Forest & Park land). The negative ecological impacts associated with natural gas drilling including forest fragmentation and invasive species would be devastating to the Savage River watershed. As such we request a prohibition on Marcellus Shale gas drilling and/or associated infrastructure on or beneath MD State Forests and other public lands.

Another significant feature within Savage River watershed is Crabtree Cave, home to several endangered species and the largest cave in Maryland. Little is known about fluid movement and connectivity in karst geology. Linkages between cave streams and other waters (ground and surface) must be determined before drilling begins so that both fragile cave ecosystems and critical water resources are protected. We request that drilling in karst topography be prohibited until these connections (and potential impacts) are determined.

SRWA asks that you take every possible action to ensure that this needed energy doesn't come at the price of the clean water and natural resources in our watershed, or elsewhere in Maryland.

*Board Members: Kenny Braitman, Annie Bristow, Mike Dean, John Fritts,
Ed Gates, Carol McDaniel, Liz McDowell, Rich Raesly, Matt Sell, Tom Wolfe*

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*SRWA is a group of local landowners and other citizens dedicated to preserving and enhancing the rural nature and natural resources of the Savage River watershed by assisting interested landowners and public land managers with environmental stewardship efforts and educational outreach.*