Keeping fracking out of our forests

George Washington National Forest at risk

The George Washington National Forest is a great place to hike, swim and camp for Virginians and our visitors alike. The 1 million acres of protected forests include natural caverns, breathtaking gardens, and six designated wilderness areas. The headwaters for the drinking water of Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia also begin in the GW.

Now, however, the controversial gas drilling technique called “fracking” could threaten the forest’s future.

Spills, pollution and earthquakes
Fracking is the term used to describe most modern onshore gas drilling activities. Large quantities of water, sand and toxic chemicals are pumped into wells that turn 90 degrees and fracture the surrounding rock to capture shale gas. Fracking has caused water contamination, wastewater spills, increased air pollution, explosions, marred landscapes, and even earthquakes in the states where it is prevalent. Recent research suggests fracking increases global warming pollution, since leakage of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, is common.

The GW is above a sliver of the “Marcellus Shale,” a supply of shale gas stretching from New York to West Virginia. Now, gas companies are pushing to allow drilling in the national forest.

A plan to protect our forest
This summer, thousands of Virginians, including hundreds of Environment Virginia supporters, urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior not to allow fracking in our national forest, out of concern for drinking water and the risks drilling would bring to the forest. In response, both Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner have weighed in, urging caution.

The U.S. Forest Service has released a draft management plan for the GW that would ban fracking, but the oil and gas industry is fighting back.

Environment Virginia is urging the Forest Service to move forward with its plan to protect one of Virginia’s most treasured places from the risky drilling practice.

For more information on our efforts to keep Virginia safe from fracking, visit: www.EnvironmentVirginia.org.
Recent action

Two key efficiency programs deserve funding
When the House Energy and Commerce hearing on the Department of Energy’s budget took place, Anna Aurilio, director of Environment Virginia’s D.C. office, released a statement advocating for funding two important energy efficiency programs. According to Aurilio, the Weatherization Assistance and State Energy Programs help many families, and are a step in the right direction in the plan to tackle global warming. However, in the past year, Congress has slashed both budgets.

The Weatherization Assistance Program helps low-income families, seniors and individuals with disabilities make energy efficiency improvements to their homes. The State Energy Program (SEP) provides financial and technical assistance to states for developing strategies to address their energy priorities and adopt energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. SEP also saves $256 million annually in reduced energy bills.

“Clean energy and energy efficiency programs are vital solutions we need right now,” said Aurilio. “We’re counting on Congress to protect and strengthen these programs, and in so doing, also protect our health and the environment.”

EPA fails to take action on factory farm pollution
Despite receiving more than 35,000 public comments last October urging them to protect our waterways from agricultural waste runoff, the Environmental Protection Agency announced in June that they would not be issuing a standard to clean up pollution from the nation’s factory farms.

“We’re sorely disappointed that the EPA is balking at setting tough new standards for protecting our waterways from factory farm pollution,” said Anna Aurilio, director of the D.C. office for Environment Virginia. “Factory farms send 100 million pounds of nitrogen pollution into the Chesapeake Bay each year, turning the estuary into a sewer, and contributing to a dead zone where fish and wildlife perish.”
What Obama’s climate plan means for Virginia

On June 25, President Obama announced a climate plan that will set limits on carbon pollution from power plants, advance energy efficiency and increase the nation’s commitment to renewable energy. In the aftermath of last summer’s severe drought and extreme heat waves, the president’s plan to address global warming was loudly applauded by Environment Virginia and many others.

“All of us who have felt the effects of global warming, or simply worried about what’s in store for our kids, can take comfort in knowing that President Obama has put the nation on a path toward a cleaner, healthier and safer future,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, Environment Virginia regional program director.

**Intense storms, worse air days**

Left unchecked, global warming is projected to bring Virginia more intense storms and more unhealthy air days. Scientists have warned that the window is rapidly closing for making the necessary cuts in carbon pollution to protect future generations from the worst consequences of global warming. To respond to this threat, the president’s plan contains several key components. It will:

- **Limit carbon pollution from new and existing power plants.** The president directed the Environmental Protection Agency to set limits on carbon pollution from new and existing power plants, which currently lack any such federal limits, despite being the largest single-source of the carbon pollution fueling global warming.

- **Invest in energy efficiency.** New efficiency measures for buildings and new appliances will cut carbon pollution by reducing our overall energy demand.

- **Build more renewable energy.** The plan focuses on expanding production of clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar, especially on public lands.

- **Support affected communities.** The president’s plan will help ensure that communities are better equipped to prepare for and recover from the impacts of global warming.

- **Rebuild U.S. leadership internationally.** The president’s plan calls for the U.S. to actively engage in international efforts to address global warming.

**Focus on cutting carbon pollution**

Environment Virginia offered special praise for the president’s pledge to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants. More than 3.2 million Americans submitted public comments last year in support of the president setting limits on carbon pollution from power plants.

“Carbon pollution from power plants is a huge part of the global warming problem,” said Ouzts. “We also know that this plan is just one important step in a multi-year effort, and that the proof of the plan’s success will be in the pudding.”

**Jewell takes steps to keep drilling off our shores**

In June, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell rebuffed the oil and gas industry’s latest effort to bring offshore drilling to the Atlantic coast. Her comments came after hearings in House and Senate committees, where Republicans pushed to overturn the Obama administration’s decision to keep the Eastern Seaboard free from deepwater drilling damage. John Rumpler, senior attorney with Environment Virginia issued a strong statement in response:

“We commend Interior Secretary Jewell for standing up to those who would subject our beautiful Atlantic Coast to dirty drilling. BP’s massive spill in the Gulf showed us the tragedy that offshore drilling can bring—for wildlife, fishermen, and coastal communities alike. And then there are the ‘ordinary’ impacts of offshore drilling—pollution, accidents, and miles of coastal lands packed with pipelines and the other ugly infrastructure of the oil and gas industry.

“From Florida to the Outer Banks to the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic Coast is home to millions of Americans, incredible beaches, and stunning wildlife. Sally Jewell did what Americans rightfully expect from our Interior Secretary: She refused to sacrifice more of our natural heritage to dirty drilling.”

To learn more about our work to curb global warming, visit: www.EnvironmentVirginia.org

▲ President Obama speaks to a group of students about the need for alternative energies.
6,000 strong for clean, local farms

This summer, we continued our campaign to support sustainable farms throughout Virginia.

We were driven by the idea that we should grow our food in ways that don’t damage our environment, but preserve and protect it instead. Unfortunately, despite the fact that factory farms dump more than 100 million pounds of pollution in waters like the Chesapeake Bay each year, the majority of our food still comes from factory farms.

Environment Virginia canvassers have gathered more than 6,000 signatures in support of the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act, which will begin to tip the scales for sustainable farms. We’ve been urging Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine to cosponsor this critical bill.

“We’ve seen an outpouring of support from people across the state who want to bring more fresh, local, healthy food to restaurants, schools and families,” said Sarah Bucci, campaign director for Environment Virginia. “It’s clear that Virginians don’t want food that comes from agribusinesses that pollute our air and water.”

more inside

Keeping fracking away from our forests; Obama commits to tackle global warming, and more.

Environment Virginia delivered 6,000 signatures to Sen. Tim Kaine’s office, asking him to cosponsor the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act.