

Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), Congressman Rush Holt (D-NJ) and Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) today announced that they have secured approval from a key House panel \$1 million in federal funding for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct a cumulative impact study on water withdrawals for hydraulic fracturing of Marcellus Shale natural gas wells in the Delaware River Basin. The House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies this week approved the funding for the study, which would be conducted in partnership with the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC). The funding next needs approval from the full Committee.

"The expected scope of hydraulic fracturing in the Delaware River Basin and the prodigious water withdrawals for this process raise important questions and concerns about the cumulative impacts of natural gas exploration and drilling in the Basin. It is estimated that more than 30,000 natural gas wells could be developed in the Upper Delaware River Basin in the coming years, and it is critical that we understand the impacts of these proposed activities upon the water resources of the Basin," said Hinchey, who in April called on the DRBC to conduct a cumulative impact study. "With over 15 million people relying on the Delaware River for clean drinking water, we simply cannot allow drilling to move forward without first giving full scrutiny to the cumulative effects on water resources throughout the region."

"Hydraulic fracturing poses a possible health and environmental threat to the millions of people who make their home in the Delaware River watershed and the almost 10 percent of the nation's population who rely on these waters for drinking, recreational, and industrial use. We should not put these invaluable resources at risk. This funding would ensure that the Delaware River Basin Commission assess the cumulative impacts of oil and gas drilling before considering hydraulic fracturing proposals," said Holt.

"There is extraordinary economic potential associated with the development of Marcellus Shale resources," said Sestak. "However, as the oil spill in the Gulf and the recent explosion in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania reminds us, there is also great risk. One way to ensure proper development is understand the potential impacts. That is why I supported the funding of the cumulative effects of drilling and operation of gas wells on the water supply in the Delaware River Basin. With information from the study, we can make educated decisions on how best to minimize the impacts of drilling, while enhancing the benefits."

The study will evaluate the cumulative impacts on water supply and resources from additional water consumption for hydraulic fracturing, landscape alteration due to gas well pad development, and changes in water quality resulting from water discharges within the Basin.

Over 15 million people, including New York City, New Jersey and Philadelphia residents, depend on the water resources of the Delaware River Basin. While property owners and local businesses could benefit economically from drilling activities in the Basin, the study is necessary to ensure that these individuals as well as other stakeholders throughout the Basin are not adversely impacted by any Marcellus Shale natural gas development and that the region's water resources are fully protected. The cumulative impact analysis will help to inform and guide DRBC management policies and practices that both enable economic progress and also ensure protection of public health and the environment. The DRBC has regulatory jurisdiction over all water withdrawals and discharges for Marcellus Shale drilling in the Delaware River Basin.

Hinchey continues to be a leading voice in federal efforts to protect drinking water and the environment from the risks of hydraulic fracturing. In April, Hinchey wrote to DRBC Executive Director Carol R. Collier to urge the agency to conduct a cumulative water impact study prior to permitting individual gas drilling projects in the Basin. In March, the EPA announced that it had initiated a study on the environmental risks of hydraulic fracturing based on legislative language Hinchey authored. Last year, Hinchey, Congresswoman Diana DeGette (D-CO), and several of his colleagues introduced the FRAC ACT – Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act – which would close the loophole that exempted hydraulic fracturing from the Safe Drinking Water Act and require the oil and gas industry to disclose the chemicals they use in their hydraulic fracturing processes. Holt and Sestak have co-sponsored the legislation.

Hinchey and Holt currently serve as co-chairs of the Congressional Delaware River Task Force, a bipartisan group of members of the U.S. House of Representatives from all four basin states (Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) that coordinate congressional efforts to promote the restoration and vitality of the Delaware River Basin and its communities.