

Comment & opinion

A 'do nothing' Forest Service

By RYAN TALBOTT

A recent editorial in *The Bradford Era* ("ANF: Land of many battles," July 7) justified drilling in the Allegheny National Forest by erroneously claiming "we can't turn our back on a source of domestic oil and gas. Period," even if drilling for that oil and gas comes at the expense of "this beautiful asset which attracts literally thousands of visitors every year."

Not only can we turn our back on that amount of oil but we would be foolish not to.

To say the amount of oil and gas that comes off the Allegheny is insignificant would be a gross understatement. Even Steve Rhoads, president of the Pennsylvania Oil and Gas Association, was quoted in this newspaper recently stating that the contribution of local oil producers is "very small in the overall picture of things."

According to the Department of Energy, Pennsylvania produced approximately 3.65 million barrels of oil in 2006. Considering the U.S. consumes over 20 million barrels of oil every single day, that comes to about a six-hour supply.

Keep in mind that drilling is at record levels in Pennsylvania, yet the state's total inventory of oil wells produce enough oil in a year to satisfy America's appetite for one morning commute.

Taking simple steps to improve our efficiency would do far more for our country than any amount of drilling ever could. For instance, a national fuel economy standard of 40 mpg would save approximately 1 billion barrels of oil a year. That is about 3,650 times more oil than all of Pennsylvania's oil wells produced in 2006.

It makes absolutely no sense to drill for oil and gas in the Allegheny when our own government and industry insiders admit that the drilling is insignificant and it takes such a heavy toll on our forests, watersheds and recreation opportunities.

Every day, however, more and more of the Allegheny is bulldozed, dissected and converted to an industrial landscape by oil and gas developers eager to cash in on record high oil and gas prices, no matter the consequences to all other forest uses.

This is only possible because the Forest Service ignores its duty to regulate oil and gas drilling in the Allegheny pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires the agency to analyze the environmental impacts of proposed drilling plans and allow the public to comment. To date, the Allegheny Forest Service refuses to conduct NEPA analysis for oil and gas drilling, even though it is the status quo on numerous other

Guest Commentary

national forests around the country that contain privately-owned mineral estates.

While the Forest Service has ignored its duty to regulate oil and gas drilling in the Allegheny, it has also ignored its duty to protect surface resources and effectively manage for recreation.

As a result, the Forest Service has allowed recreation facilities to get so run down that now, rather than seeking the funds to repair them, it simply wants to close campgrounds and decommission drinking water and wastewater facilities across the Allegheny. And when these recreation areas, such as Tracy Ridge and Beaver Meadows campgrounds close, don't be surprised when oil and gas wells take their place.

We've heard of the "do nothing Congress." We have a do nothing Forest Service.

Do nothing to regulate oil and gas drilling in accordance with federal law.

Do nothing to address even the most basic maintenance needs to keep recreation facilities open and operating.

Do nothing to address the public's concern that it is losing its national forest before its very eyes.

We need real leadership from the Forest Service if future generations are to experience an Allegheny National Forest that has more to offer than closed facilities and oil and gas wells.

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