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Seneca Nation, Federal, State and Local Government Officials, Environmental Experts Discuss Dangers of Proposed Fracking Plan
Watershed Alliance members gather for day-long meeting on Allegany Territory

ALLEGANY TERRITORY, SALAMANCA, N.Y. – As the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection continues its review of a controversial proposed wastewater treatment plant on the Allegheny River, a widespread group of elected officials, representatives from multiple governments, and environmental experts gathered for a day-long meeting on the Seneca Nation’s Allegany Territory to discuss concerns over the dangers the project presents.

The group included Seneca Nation officials, federal, state and local government officials from multiple agencies in Pennsylvania and New York, Native American advocates and representatives, and environmental experts. The purpose of the meeting was to establish lines of communication to effectively collaborate on watershed scale.

The meeting began with the Gano:nyok, a traditional Seneca thanksgiving address.

“Each time we recite our thanksgiving address, we give thanks for the water. Water is life, and it is all of our responsibility to protect it,” said Seneca Nation President Todd Gates. “It is not for any individual or group to destroy or contaminate the water, nor to deprive future generations of that
most vital natural gift. That is why we are all here today – to be mindful stewards of Mother Earth for the generations who will come after us.”

Governments and agencies represented at the meeting were: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, New York State DEC, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Service, the office of New York State Senator Cathy Young, the office of New York State Assemblyman Joe Giglio, CAMA, the Cattaraugus County Legislature, the City of Salamanca, the City of Olean, the Salamanca Central School District, United South & Eastern Tribes, and the Tuscarora Nation, as well as Dr. John Stolz, director of the Center for Environmental Research and Education at Duquesne University.

Much of the day’s discussion focused on the proposal by Epiphany Allegheny, LLC (Epiphany) and the Coudersport Area Municipal Authority (CAMA) that would allow for the transport, treatment and release of thousands of gallons of dangerous wastewater from hydraulic fracturing (fracking) into the Allegheny River. The proposed treatment facility would discharge up to 42,000 gallons of treated fracking water, with insufficient removal of radioactivity, into the river each day, although the plant could process between 20,000 – 80,000 gallons daily. Water used for fracking in Pennsylvania contains high levels of radiation, due to its location in the Marcellus Shale region.

The Allegheny River is a source of drinking water for millions of people, from the Southern Tier of New York down to Pittsburgh. The Seneca Nation contends that during extreme high water events, which are a regular occurrence in the region, contaminated sediment from the facility will be transported and deposited downstream, ultimately accumulating in the Allegheny Reservoir, which sits on Seneca Nation territory. The reservoir was created by the construction of the Kinzua Dam in the 1960s, when 10,000 acres of Seneca land was condemned by the United States government and approximately 600 residents were removed from their homes.

Additionally, the proposed treatment facility would be located in a 100-year floodplain. In the event of a flood or spill, thousands of gallons of untreated hazardous and radioactive material stored on-site would be released directly into the Allegheny River.
“The headwaters of the Allegheny River are some of the purest I have tested. They need to be protected,” Dr. Stolz said. “We have learned from other brine treatment facilities operating in the Allegheny basin that their discharges have degraded the water quality.”

The PA DEP has reported that it has received more than 3,000 comments regarding the Epiphany project, which could have destructive environmental and health impacts on thousands of people and wildlife who live along the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania, New York, and on Seneca Territory.

In addition to the Seneca Nation, the plan has also drawn the opposition of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the New York State DEC, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Cattaraugus County Legislature, the Salamanca City Council, and other government organizations, as well as individual residents.

“Contamination doesn’t know geography,” stated Seneca Nation Treasurer Maurice A. John, Sr., who gave the closing remarks at today’s meeting. “Contaminants released into the water at the project site won’t just stay at that site. They will travel, like the water itself, through communities in Pennsylvania and New York, and here to Ohi:yo’, our Allegany Territory. Everyone who traveled to join us today are of one mind in recognizing the importance of the river and the importance of protecting the river for the next generations.”

- 30 -