



# Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TO:** The Ithaca Journal  
**FROM:** Tompkins County SWCD  
**DATE:** January, 2010  
**RE:** Press Release

### Marcellus Shale Drilling: If it's "A Go", Tompkins County Soil & Water District is Ready for "The Flow"

Marcellus Shale Drilling has been a hot topic for quite some time among those who reside in Tompkins County, and the Southern Tier region. What the Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District wants county residents to know is that; IF this happens, we WILL be prepared. What is involved? No one can say exactly what the plans are right now -- but you can bet that it will involve soil, and it will involve water. Who better to take an active role in such a project than an organization that has been doing it for decades.

*It is the mission of the Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District to provide assistance to citizens and units of local government in making sound decisions on the management of soil, water and related natural resources based on their needs. The District will further assist in the implementation of decision by seeking and coordinating technical and financial assistance from federal, state, and local governments, and private sources.*

In addition to assisting farmers in managing agricultural resources like manure, erodible soils, wetlands and forests, the District also assists municipalities, landowners and others with stormwater control regulations, flooding and erosion concerns.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will of course take the lead on regulating the gas drilling, and the Tompkins County Conservation District would be able to provide technical assistance and a degree of oversight for certain aspects of the drilling process.

“If this drilling comes to pass, there’s going to be a lot of pipelines crossing the landscape including farm land and forest land, and in that respect, Soil and Water Conservation Districts are by law the lead on agricultural water quality issues. Erosion and water quality concerns associated with gas well pads, pipelines, and compressor stations are all areas that could use help from District oversight.” Says Craig Schutt, Tompkins County Soil & Water Conservation District Manager.

Over the years, the Conservation District has worked cooperatively with other agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and Markets, DEC, environmental organizations, and local municipalities. They are a member of the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, an organization of Soil & Water Conservation Districts in the

Upper Susquehanna Watershed. The coalition is comprised of 16 Districts in New York and three in northern Pennsylvania.

“A major area of concern is how DEC would handle a natural gas industry that would rapidly increase with the development of Marcellus Shale drilling,” said Ronald Updike, Chairman of the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District Board. “Would they hire more staff and provide training? Where would the money come from? How long would it take? The Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District, and other Districts in New York State, already have the staff, experience and expertise in protecting water quality and erosion and sediment control necessary for the forward progress of the drilling. The best part would be that the Conservation District is localized to Tompkins County. For years the District has been aiding and assisting landowners, residents, partnering agencies, and has established a credible rapport.”

Recently a group of Cornell University law students who studied the Marcellus Shale development stated that the DEC is “insufficiently staffed” to monitor gas drilling. At the same time, they stated “the best people to oversee the water resources vulnerable to gas drilling would be those who are most familiar with managing them: County Soil & Water Conservation Districts.”

Of course there is always the question of money. Where will it come from? This is also a concern for Tompkins County Soil & Water District.

Schutt stated, “What we do know is that we have the trained staff in place, we have a good relationship with landowners and farmers in the county, we are efficient at what we do, and we could most likely provide the technical assistance at a less expensive rate than any other agency or group.”

It goes back to the old saying *why go out for milk, when you have the cow at home.*

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