



The Ohio Ornithological Society
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Columbus, Ohio 43214

An Open Letter to Mr. James Zehringer, Director of Ohio Division of Natural Resources, and Mr. George Elmaraghy, Chief, Ohio Division of Surface Water:

“Fracking” (using the current process of pumping water mixed with sediment and chemical additives into underground shale formations to maximize oil and gas extraction) requires large quantities of water, frequently pumped from local streams. Withdrawing additional water in these quantities from Ohio's rivers and streams has the potential for serious detrimental effects on all other water users. Penn State University, in a publication entitled “Marcellus Education Fact Sheet”, quantifies these water requirements by stating that in the Susquehanna River basin over a two year period, 220 wells withdrew 506.8 million gallons of surface water. All of this water is considered a lost resource, as 90% of it remains sealed deep underground, and the 10% that returns to the surface is a hazardous waste.

As noted in a series of articles in The Akron Beacon-Journal this year, Ohio's surface water resources are not well protected. Contractors do not need a permit to withdraw water from Ohio streams, only public access. When withdrawal exceeds 100,000 gallons per day, the usage must be registered with the state's Division of Soil and Water Resources, but there is no limit to how much can be withdrawn.

In neighboring Pennsylvania, with more stringent permit requirements but still a desire to embrace oil and gas production, this summer's droughts have forced the state to suspend several withdrawal permits as streams have dropped below flow objectives. Fishermen, boaters, and environmentalists are concerned that increases to water withdrawal have outpaced our understanding of the impact of these withdrawals on the streams (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, August, 2011)

In Ohio, we have drained or developed 98% of our original wetlands. Nearly all of our streams have been dammed, straightened, or de-forested, leaving Ohio with very few remaining natural and scenic waterways. Native birds, fishes, amphibians, and aquatic plants have been significantly reduced in diversity and quantity as we degraded these water resources.

Our remaining high quality streams are special places, and have been recognized as such by being designated as Ohio's Scenic Rivers. Ohioans have expended significant resources to improve and protect this riverine habitat. Dam removal, reforestation, planned watershed development, and other efforts have resulted in greater opportunities to enjoy Scenic Rivers, and also increased the value of these streams as habitat for native plants and animals.

Representing our 640 members, as well as the estimated 3.5 million wildlife viewers in Ohio and the thousands of Ohio citizens who enjoy our Scenic Rivers in canoes or with fishing equipment, the Ohio Ornithological Society opposes the withdrawal of water for fracking from any watershed supporting a designated Scenic River.

Removal of water in the required quantities from these watersheds may significantly damage their recreational value as well as their value as wildlife habitat. It will make them more susceptible to periods of drought, less navigable, and will damage or eliminate certain types of river habitat such as the fast, deep runs required by the endangered eastern hellbender. These risks are unacceptable to such limited resources.

Ohio Ornithological Society
“Ohio's Birding Network”
www.ohiobirds.org