

## Intensive Drilling Changes Hunters' Game Plans

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Hunters living next to the Millennium pipeline aren't too worried about the nearly 100-foot wide right-of-way dissecting their forest. It's opened the woods, attracting deer and turkey and, judging from the number of tree stands, a few local hunters as well.

Hunting is big business in New York. One study by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ranks NY fourth in annual retail sales generated by hunting. Each hunter spends an average of \$1800 on clothing and sporting goods, bringing in a total of more than \$890 million a year. Add lodging, gasoline purchases, restaurant meals and permits and you're looking at a \$1.5 billion contribution to the state's economy.

But some hunters worry about the impact intensive shale drilling will have on their hunting grounds and the herds. Pennsylvania hunters have already found their favorite spots cleared to make way for drilling activities.

### **Hunters Face Obstacles**

"Hunters venturing out this hunting season may be surprised by the level of Marcellus activity on public land," says Margaret Brittingham from Penn State University. She told the press that Marcellus drilling on state land has more than doubled in the past year, increasing from 1970 active permits in October 2009 to more than 4500 active this October.

Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) recently warned hunters that they may find new roads in many areas, and to expect heavy amounts of truck traffic where there are active drill sites. The agency has promised to limit heavy truck traffic Nov 20 – 23 for bear season, as well as other days when high numbers of hunters are expected on state lands.

Meanwhile, state foresters urge hunters to take precautions when shooting around well sites and clearings where well pad construction is going on. "The well pad is a restricted area that is not open to the public," says DCNR. Active well pads will be posted with signs 150 yards from the edge of the pad, and no hunting will be allowed within those zones.

Inactive pads will not be posted. The only dividing line between the public forest and the restricted area will be a line of native vegetation, and it will be the hunter's responsibility to remain on the "public" side of that line.

### **Drilling and Herd Decline**

Pennsylvania hunters may have trouble finding motel rooms, but they shouldn't have any problem finding deer. At least not yet, say DCNR foresters, though some hunters have complained that helicopters and other activities around well pads have scared animals away from favorite hunting spots.

New York hunters shouldn't experience any difficulties bagging their game, says NY Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) officer Stan Winnick. The state hasn't experienced the intensive drilling seen in PA, he notes, and so far the DEC hasn't issued special rules for hunting near wells or active drilling areas.

Most hunters are extremely careful in the field, Winnick says. They're after game and unlikely to hit tanks and exposed pipes. He doesn't see hunting near well sites as an issue – at least not this year.

Some hunters, though, are concerned about the long-term impacts intensive drilling might have on local populations of deer and game birds. Colorado Division of Wildlife biologists report that drilling and road construction create a level of disturbance and habitat fragmentation that some animals can't tolerate. Drilling activities cause stress in the herds, and biologists have seen a decline in population of deer and elk over the past seven years.

The biggest factor they see is the impact of roads. The deer and elk populations depend on large unbroken stands of spruce and fir, forested areas that provide shelter from wind and cold as well as cover. Roads have sliced those forests into increasingly smaller fragments. Smaller forests means fewer elk.

Well density impacts herds, too. Wyoming scientists report that a density of one gas well per square mile has minimal effects on mule deer populations, while sixteen wells per square mile shows detrimental effects on the populations.

For the moment deer herds in NY and PA seem to be coexisting with drilling. It could be too early to tell, as most studies indicate that it takes a year before biologists (and hunters) will notice population declines.

### **An Emerging Food Safety Issue**

Hunting is more than recreation; many locals count on their deer to stock the freezer. So do local food pantries. Since 1999 hunters have donated more than 335 tons of venison to the Venison Donation Coalition. That translates to 2,700,800 meals sent to local food pantries.

But how safe is venison harvested from areas where intensive industrialized drilling takes place? That's a question deer farmer Martha Goodsell would like to see addressed by DEC and NY Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Goodsell, along with her husband Brian, own and operate Fallow Hollow Deer Farm in Candor. To make sure their herd isn't exposed to diseases from wild deer, the Goodsells have to enclose their pastures with 8-foot high fence. Their herd also undergoes numerous inspections to ensure the safety of the meat before it gets into the food stream.

But who ensures the safety of wild venison, Goodsell asks? Her concerns arise from an incident in Pennsylvania this July when 28 cows came into contact with drilling wastewater from a nearby natural gas operation. Though the cows were not observed drinking the salty wastewater, the PA Department of Agriculture quarantined the animals.

Some of those animals must be withheld from the food chain for a minimum of two years, Goodsell notes. She wonders why officials aren't concerned about deer and game birds near drill sites. Three electrified wires and flimsy plastic snow fence aren't enough to keep thirsty animals away from a frack pit, she explains.