



# Southeast Ohio Alliance to Save Our Water

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## **Grassroots Organization Demands Army Corps Release Records**

The Southeast Ohio Alliance to Save Our Water (SOASOW), in affiliation with the FreshWater Accountability Project, announced today it continues to wait word from the US Army Corps of Engineers regarding records requests and appeals sent to the Huntington office and Washington DC headquarters. In an ongoing attempt to understand the “partnering” relationships between the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District and the US Army Corps of Engineers, the SOASOW has yet to hear back from a second public records request appeal to the Huntington District Office.

“Even though the Freedom of Information Act makes it very clear that the public is to have access to these records, we continue to be frustrated that the Army Corps is not releasing information that we deem to be necessary to understand how the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District could be allowed to lease for unconventional shale drilling around and under public reservoirs, as well as sell reservoir water for profit,” stated Lea Harper of SOASOW. “From the sparse information we have received thus far, it seems the US Army Corps has only performed a cursory review of the potential threat to water quality and availability by allowing the MWCD to lease reservoirs to serve the risky and consumptive industry of high volume horizontal fracturing (fracking).”

A “Talking Points” document that was received through a records request from the Pittsburgh USACE District Office offered a stark comparison to how the Huntington District Office values reservoir water. Although the Huntington District Office appears to only value reservoirs for the “storage” capacity for flood control, the Pittsburgh office values water quality and quantity in terms of water purity, water storage, water supply, navigation, low-flow augmentation, environmental restoration, fish and wildlife enhancement, recreation and regulatory permitting. This is in contrast to the Huntington Office which deals mostly in terms of water storage from the limited records that have been received. The Huntington District has also concluded that since the MWCD was given reservoir land by the Federal Government, it then, in turn, owns the water that accumulated behind the dams once they were built. This is an important distinction between different Army Corps’ offices that determines whether or not the Army Corps should be involved in water protection, removal, and oversight of withdrawals and potential threats to quality. Even though the Huntington Office provided sample water use contract verbiage to the MWCD, what was provided valued water only for its storage value. The Pittsburgh District, on the other hand, stated: “Because shale gas extraction activities represent an emerging consumptive use requiring significant volumes of water, the District (Pittsburgh) is concerned with the cumulative impact of basin-wide water withdrawals above and below our reservoirs.”

The more reasonable and protective Pittsburgh office policy compared to the Huntington Office is at the base of citizens' concerns about the role the Army Corps should play when acting in partnership with the MWCD to serve the shale gas drilling industry. So far it appears that the Huntington Office is sanctioning water sales and leasing for fracking by taking a hands-off role in regard to shale gas industry demands. "This is not the original intent by the Federal government when land was given to the conservancy district to protect in the public interest as far as we can tell," stated Lea Harper. "We demand that the MWCD act for public benefit by protecting reservoirs which was the justification for the public tax assessment that prevailed in court against objections from over 5,000 property owners."

"The few records we have received from the Army Corps' Huntington Office shows a cozy relationship with the MWCD in which the Army prefers to remain hands off MWCD decision making about reservoirs. We do not understand the apparent lack of concern by the Huntington office in the face of potential risk to Army Corp's dams and infrastructure due to subsidence possibilities and seismic risks involved, as well as threats of contamination, erosion and siltation in reservoirs, connecting streams, wetlands and tributaries that could be detrimentally affected by easements, clearcutting, pipelines and water sales for fracking," stated Lea Harper. "As a citizen's grassroots organization with members who are property owners within the watershed district, we have a right to know the extent of collaboration and partnering that is taking place between the MWCD and USACE."

All records requests, appeal letters and documents that have been provided so far by the Huntington Office can be accessed on the FreshWater Accountability Project Ohio website at [www.FWAPOH.com](http://www.FWAPOH.com).