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**GRASSROOTS GROUP DENOUNCES PLANS TO FRACK PIEDMONT LAKE  
Conservancy District to be Held Accountable for Damages**

Despite years of protest along with scientific documentation to warn that reservoirs should not be leased for horizontal hydraulic fracturing (fracking), the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) continues to lease public reservoirs given to it by the Federal Government as well as sell water to service the industry for its personal profit. Despite the fact that the MWCD is being challenged in court over its authority to lease public lands for fracking, the conservancy district continues to lease reservoirs under its jurisdiction. At its April Board Meeting, it is expected the MWCD will lease yet another reservoir, Piedmont, to Antero Resources of Denver, Colorado without environmental assessment or competitive bidding and despite public protest.

Fracking in the Utica shale destroys on average over 5 million gallons of freshwater per frack. As a conservancy district, the MWCD is failing in its charge to provide clean water for drinking as well as other important uses such as agriculture and recreation. According to FracTracker, the continued leasing of reservoirs and sale of water for profit is a threat to the long-term health and viability of the watershed ([www.fracktracker.org](http://www.fracktracker.org)). Even though facts have been presented to warn of the damage to the watershed, the MWCD and its governing body, the Conservancy Court, continue to serve the fracking industry by leasing public lands and selling public waters. The current plan to lease Piedmont Lake continues to move forward despite the threat to the peaceful enjoyment of property for local residents as well as degradation of property values in the area.

“This is what can happen when a public entity is allowed to operate without oversight, responsibility and accountability while still receiving public tax dollars as the MWCD is doing,” stated Lea Harper, co-founder of FreshWater Accountability Project (FWAP). “Despite the scientific information provided with warnings to the MWCD and the Army Corps of Engineers of the potential harm to the water, dams, human health and property values in the area, the conservancy district prefers to serve the temporary fracking industry for the windfall profits it can gain. How can a conservancy district receive taxes to operate for public benefit, which is how the assessment was justified, reaping in \$10 - \$11 million per year, without the responsibility to protect natural resources? No matter how much money the MWCD makes, there is no requirement for competitive bidding, no oversight, little cost sharing, and no accounting for how it spends its ill-gotten gains. This is taxation without representation – as un-American as it gets.”

Through lax regulation in Ohio Revised Code 6101, the MWCD reaps windfall profits of potentially hundreds of millions of dollars as the largest conservancy district in Ohio. The MWCD is allowed to lease for fracking and sell public water despite the protest of property owners and concerned individuals and organizations. All the public can do is make statements for a maximum of three minutes before a monthly MWCD board meeting or write to the Conservancy Court. The MWCD is able to do what it wants to do because there is basically no oversight. Last year, those who protested the MWCD’s actions were not even allowed to testify at the annual meeting of the Conservancy Court judges.

“The MWCD says it is transparent while meeting with industry insiders to negotiate deals behind closed doors, furnishing the final lease as an example of transparency. It is hard to believe that they think they can fool the public with rhetoric in this way,” continued Lea Harper. “The MWCD has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money to create a new image for itself as an ‘environmental steward’ of the public resources to promote their propaganda and deceptions. It is time for Ohioans to see through the misinformation to establish accountability for their public officials who are catering to the industry rather than protecting water resources, public health and property values”

Terry Lodge, attorney for FWAP who is challenging the MWCD’s authority to lease public lands in court, stated, “The MWCD is a nationwide leader in creating the superficial impression that the earth is to be crassly commodified for a public entity’s sole profit. We continue to question the authority the MWCD has to collect taxes and lease and sell water for profit for a single, highly unregulated, temporary industry.”

“From my experience, it is pretty useless to do any kind of protesting to the MWCD regarding any of their decisions, because they strictly adhere to the very loose Ohio regulations and have no accountability to tax payers or those with concerns about their properties on the lakes,” stated Lea Harper. “However, we continue to document for the damages that are likely to occur in the future. We recommend Piedmont Lake area property owners have their properties appraised before clearcutting and drilling begins, have any well water tested, obtain a means to monitor air quality, and document with a log, pictures and video’s the nuisance of heavy truck traffic, noise, health effects and negative impacts to peaceful enjoyment of property they may experience.”

The detrimental property value impacts are being documented near gas drilling operations (<http://www.desmogblog.com/2013/11/25/new-evidence-fracking-s-property-value-impacts-banks-growing-reluctant-lend-near-gas-wells>) and cautionary reports about health effects are rapidly surfacing. A recent article in the UK summarized the current situation well: “In the USA, where more than 52,000 shale gas wells have been drilled, research suggests that risks of environmental contamination are present at all stages of extraction. These include surface spills and leakages, emissions from gas-processing equipment, and pollution from the large numbers of heavy transport vehicles involved. There is therefore ample opportunity for pollutants to contaminate the air, and ground and surface water.” (<http://www.westerndailypress.co.uk/Fracking-vital-drill-health-implications/story-20851408-detail/story.html>).

Those who would like more information can log on to [www.FWAP.org](http://www.FWAP.org). The public is encouraged to get informed about the new, temporary and highly unregulated industry in Ohio. Once informed, those who want to join to protest how the MWCD operates or the leasing of yet another public reservoir are encouraged to contact their state representatives, write to Judge O’Farrell at the Conservancy Court in New Philadelphia, Ohio, and/or contact FWAP or MWCD directly.

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