

OHIOANS DEMAND BETTER PROTECTIONS FOR STATE LANDS AND WATER

(Athens, OH) Off and on for over ten years, thousands of comments have been submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to oppose the leasing of the Wayne National Forest for unconventional oil and gas development (fracking). With the most recent scoping period for comments ending today, the BLM could lease the 41 parcels nominated totaling approximately 2,794 acres of federal mineral estate underlying the Wayne National Forest (WNF) for future oil and gas development in Monroe and Washington counties by September 2026. These actions are taken despite a [prior court's rebuke for failing to consider threats to public health, endangered species and watersheds](#) before opening more than 40,000 acres of the forest to fracking.

In addition, Ohio is leasing its remaining public lands that have minerals for fracking. Just this week, the Ohio Oil and Gas Land Management Commission voted to lease an additional 6,700 of Ohio's public lands to be fracked without answering the question – what are the cumulative and projected impacts to Ohio's water quantity and quality when [10-14 million gallons of water per well](#) are consumed by fracking?

As part of the current administration's directives to mine and drill for every ounce of minerals and despite the growing public health, environmental and climate warming impacts, the BLM continues to sell mineral rights without public benefit - a large portion of fracked gas is now being shipped overseas. The cumulative impacts, especially to increasingly threatened water resources, have not been adequately assessed and addressed as the leasing of Ohio's remaining pristine public lands continues in the region. Additionally, there are inadequate bonding and insurance requirements for the industry with reports recommending that, ["...policymakers must require, among other things, that the oil and gas industry provide up front financial assurance commensurate with the potential for damage."](#)

"Our government seems to only care about the revenue for leasing and royalties for minerals, assuring they receive the money and not adjacent land owners, seeking short-term revenue despite long-term, costly damages that are [mounting due to fracking](#)," stated Lea Harper, Managing Director of FreshWater Accountability Project. "Our warnings that Ohio's precious water resources are under serious threat, not only from the cumulative impacts of fracking in the region, but from the additional water demands for existing and new high-volume users, such as agriculture and data centers, remain unheeded by our elected officials."

[Recent news](#) pointed out the coming collision course between farmers and industry in Ohio due to growing water demands. The Ohio EPA commissioned a [Central Ohio Regional Water Study](#) that identified many resource gaps related to projected water demands in that region. Despite

the cumulative impacts from fracking in Southeast Ohio, there are no immediate plans for a similar study in the region, even though this should be a requirement before additional fracking of public lands is allowed. A water study is of even greater importance because of increased evaporation from the warming climate and the droughts that are ongoing in Ohio, threats that are acknowledged in the Central Ohio study and in many other recent scientific studies.

Fracking's water quantity and quality impacts continue to grow. Combined with the lack of adequate bonding and insurance to guarantee that the LLC's who frack public lands are held accountable for the necessary well plugging and remediation in the future, taxpayers could be left to pay the bill from the water losses and contamination by fracking and frack waste processing and disposal.

In addition to the growing water demands and the pollution of remaining water supplies, comments also recently closed on the USEPA proposal to remove [Clean Water Act protections which would affect 96% of Ohio's wetlands and streams](#). [The removal of National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) implementing regulations](#) exemplifies the power of different presidents to issue Executive Orders to either enhance or detract from the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ's) authority to promulgate regulations or to maintain the regulations that it had historically issued, likely further degrading environmental protection regulations, consistency and oversight by the federal government. The current President removed this authority when he rescinded a prior Executive Order and at the same time directed CEQ to begin the process of rescinding its NEPA implementing regulations. These are just a few examples of threats to environmental protections being implemented from the federal to state-level executive, legislative and regulatory agencies.

The cumulative impacts of water loss and pollution are not being assessed and addressed as fracking and its consumptive water use continue to expand without necessary protections. Additionally, Dr. Randi Pokladnik of Ohio Valley Environmental Advocates states, "The mesophytic forests of the Wayne National Forest are more than just trees and hills. They provide habitat for many endangered species, serve as a watershed for local communities, sequester carbon dioxide in the second-growth trees, and are economically valuable as a recreational asset for Ohioans and out-of-state visitors."

With inadequate regulation and oversight of fracking and frack waste and the lack of political will by state and federal governments to check the industry and hold it accountable for harms there is no check on the increasing costs to the environment and public health. Despite the growing body of evidence of the costs of fracking, public health impacts and climate change, the current political landscape [continues to favor fossil fuels](#) despite the worsening impacts of pollution, water destruction and greenhouse gas emissions. Eventually, the fracking boom will become a bust, and what will be left of Ohio's water and valuable forests and parks remain to

be seen. NEPA still supports a coordinated review process with state regulators; however, with Ohio's current political constraints that favor fossil fuel development over renewable energy, the combined lack of oversight by both the federal and state governmental agencies does not bode well for water and public health protection. Another legal complaint was launched on December 3, 2025 outlining once again the failure to take NEPA's required "hard look" at the impacts of fracking, especially the cumulative air and water pollution impacts that are increasingly apparent.

The public comment period to better protect the Wayne National Forest from fracking has ended, but not the growing public awareness of the industry's harms and opposition to the leasing of public lands and sales of water for fracking. As Roxanne Groff of Athens County asserts, "Ohioans will continue to demand that the Wayne serve the economic best interests of our region, as required by law, and practice ecological forest management to protect biodiversity, climate, regional air and water, and human and animal health." Even though it is an uphill battle, Ohioans will continue to demand better protections and work for a more just, healthy and prosperous future for all.