**Make candidates take a stand on fracking Ohio parks: editorial**

**https://www.cleveland.com/opinion/2024/03/make-candidates-take-a-stand-on-fracking-ohio-parks-editorial.html**

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[I removed the map described below on this copy of the article because the copy looked very distorted]

A screenshot of a map enclosed in documents, obtained in a public records request, that Encino Energy submitted to the state in an offer to buy leasing rights to drill for oil and gas under Salt Fork State Park

* [Editorial Board, cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer](https://www.cleveland.com/staff/editorial-board-cle/posts.html)

On Jan. 6, 2023, Gov. Mike DeWine [signed House Bill 507 into law](https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/134/hb507/status). It carried the innocuous title: “Revise number of poultry chicks that may be sold in lots.”

But thanks to [last-minute December 2022 shenanigans](https://www.cleveland.com/open/2022/12/senate-passes-bill-expanding-drilling-on-state-land-dubbing-gas-green-energy.html) by the lame-duck 134th General Assembly, which was about to cease when the newly elected 135th General Assembly took office in January, miraculously, this little proposed bill about poultry chicks suddenly became a giant turkey stuffed with special-interest goodies.

The biggest winner from the lame-duck amendments was the oil and gas industry.

As signed into law, the bill infamously defined natural gas as “green energy.” And it removed the brakes from oil and gas drilling in and under Ohio parks and wildlife areas by changing the wording in state law. Under the hurriedly adopted HB 507 amendments, state agencies were told they “shall” issue leases for “the exploration for and development and production of oil or natural gas” on state land -- not that they “may.”

In other words, HB 507 now required state agencies to issue such leases, as long as the leases met certain requirements under state law and as long as the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission hadn’t issued its own rules (which it had failed to do since 2011, when Ohio opened state land to oil and gas drilling).

Environmental groups immediately challenged the constitutionality of the law, citing in part the state’s (poorly enforced) “single-subject” rule for laws. A Franklin County Common Pleas Court judge [declined to issue a temporary restraining order](https://www.cleveland.com/open/2023/04/judge-denies-request-to-pause-law-expanding-fracking-in-state-parks.html), and HB 507 took force nearly a year ago, on April 7, 2023, although that lawsuit is still pending.

Meanwhile, lease applications started pouring in, with one driller from Texas promising the state a signing bonus and royalties [it claimed could total $2 billion over 15 years](https://www.cleveland.com/open/2023/04/texas-driller-offers-ohio-potential-of-nearly-2-billion-to-frack-salt-fork-state-park.html) for drilling rights under iconic Salt Fork State Park near Cambridge, Ohio, the state’s largest and one of its most scenic and historic parks. That proposal -- made before HB 507 took force -- ultimately was rejected, but the next batch were not.

Last November, over the catcalls and raucous chants of a room full of drilling opponents, the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission “[granted seven of the 10 requests for tracts](https://www.cleveland.com/open/2023/11/ohio-opens-salt-fork-state-park-and-two-wildlife-areas-to-fracking-for-gas.html) spanning thousands of acres at Salt Fork in Guernsey County, plus smaller swaths of Valley Run Wildlife Area in Carroll County and Zepernick Run Wildlife Area in Columbiana County,” cleveland.com’s Jake Zuckerman reported at the time.

Zuckerman noted the commissioners also “rejected a request to frack under Wolf Run State Park.” However, he reported, “Their rationale for the latter decision could not be heard over the thunder of chants.”

Now, more wildlife areas are being targeted for drilling.

Zuckerman reported earlier this month that, “An unidentified driller filed an application [to open the Egypt Valley Wildlife Area in Belmont County](https://www.cleveland.com/open/2024/03/gas-driller-asks-ohio-to-open-belmont-county-wildlife-area-for-fracking.html) to oil and gas extraction” and just days later, that, “An unidentified driller [asked the state to open all 85 acres of Keen Wildlife Area](https://www.cleveland.com/open/2024/03/drillers-ask-ohio-for-permission-to-frack-natural-gas-under-keen-wildlife-area.html) in Harrison County for oil and gas extraction.”

Note the words “unidentified driller.”

The whole process of awarding these leases [lacks transparency](https://www.cleveland.com/news/2024/02/ohio-panel-greenlights-fracking-under-state-park-nature-reserves.html). Why aren’t the applicant drillers identified? What is the rationale for some leases and not others? Do the leases include safeguards, both contractually and environmentally, that comply with Ohio law? Why aren’t drillers required to report exactly what’s in the slurry of chemicals and other substances that they’re injecting into these long horizontal fracking wells?

There is one obvious way to fix this: The 136th General Assembly, to be elected in November and that will be taking office next January, can draft a new law to require full transparency on all lease bids, contracts and injected substances. Such a law can be drafted to ensure that all oil and gas lease applications are fully vetted, that public comments aren’t compromised and that the lease deals follow all aspects and safeguards of current Ohio law.

With many of the same legislators who voted for Substitute House Bill 507 seeking election this year, voters have a chance to demand accountability from them and everyone seeking General Assembly seats. All 99 House seats and half the Senate seats are up for election in November. Demand your candidates’ position on drilling under Ohio’s parks and wildlife areas. And ask them to defend their stances if they voted for Sub. HB 507. A full list of those who voted “yea” on the final bill can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/32678ptt>. \*

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\* only 2 Republican Reps and 1 Republican Senator (Matt Dolan) voted against HB 507