I am vehemently opposed to any fracking (high-pressure hydraulic fracturing) in the Marietta Unit of the Wayne National Forest. The area under consideration for fracking is in Washington County, one of the 22 Ohio counties in the federally designated region of Appalachia. There has been a decades-long pattern of exploitation of Appalachia, involving the extraction of natural resources for the benefit (profits) of outsiders and to the detriment of local residents. In the 1800s this exploitation involved lumber and coal. Nowadays it involves natural gas. Research by the Ohio River Valley Institute [(https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-peak-natural-gas-and-the-economic-implications-for-appalachia/)]((https:/ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-peak-natural-gas-and-the-economic-implications-for-appalachia/)%20) has demonstrated that the oil& gas boom of the last 15 years has resulted in no appreciable improvement in the local economies of the region, no greater employment, and no prosperity when compared to national figures on these measures. Furthermore, residents of those Appalachian communities will suffer the health risks of fracking when the drilling begins (in a 2022 report Physicians for Social Responsibility have documented health problems associated with fracking activities).

During the BLM-sponsored April 8 public meeting on this matter, I posed a question about brine waste that results from fracking activities and mentioned that Washington County has the highest level of brine waste of any Ohio county injected under its lands. Most brine waste is radioactive, and it contains toxic chemicals; admittedly, only about 1% of the brine waste contains these substances like heavy metals, brine, carcinogens, volatile organic compounds, but when millions of gallons of this waste water are involved, the total chemical contents are non-trivial.

Materials for fracking are exempted from the Safe Drinking Act, from the Clean Air At, and from the Clean Water Act. This results in more risks to our Appalachian region without any recourse for legal action.

Fugitive methane emissions are another risk to local residents as well as a contributor to climate change-at over 80 times the consequential greenhouse emissions as carbon dioxide. Over 100 studies have demonstrated air pollutants as result of fracking.

Water pollution is a special risk to the Wayne National Forest and to its delicate ecology. PFAS chemicals are also part of the result of oil & gas operations.

Safety and accident considerations are another reason to deny oil & gas drilling in this area. There will be roads built to accommodate truck traffic around wells in the Wayne National Forest. In a Pennsylvania study it was found that 6.3% showed infringements (accident violations) from 2005-2013. It is not a question of “if” an accident occurs as result of this drilling but “when.”

We in southeast have become cynical and discouraged about offering comments in situations like this one that applies to Wayne National Forest. A few years ago we expressed very strongly our objections to the shipping of brine waste by barge on the Ohio River. The US Army Corps of Engineers went ahead with this plan anyway. In the past year many of us were outraged by the deceptive action of the Ohio Legislature to mandate fracking under Ohio’s public lands. All of our comments, many in writing, many in person, were ignored as the Ohio Oil & Gas Land Management Commission went ahead in accepting bids for these fracking rights in places like our state parks, many of which are in eastern Ohio. We hope that the BLM will take our concerns seriously and put an end to any thoughts of leasing for fracking in Wayne National Forest.

George Banziger