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By [Jonathan E. Rinde](#)

[We can safely extract our natural gas](#)

Pennsylvania has the laws and the experience to develop the Marcellus Shale

The discovery of vast reserves of natural gas contained within the [Marcellus Shale](#) formation deep within Pennsylvania's geology has been in the news, with some questioning whether Pennsylvania can manage and regulate the exploration and production of natural gas in a manner which protects the commonwealth's natural resources. There are several reasons to believe Pennsylvania can properly balance both of these interests.

By some estimates, the natural gas reserves found in the Marcellus could heat all of the homes in the United States for 16 years. In that respect, tapping into the natural gas within the Marcellus is an important component of any plan to move the United States toward energy independence.

Natural gas is a clean-burning fuel, with less than half the carbon dioxide emissions as coal. For that reason, the natural gas trapped within the Marcellus Shale provides a potential "bridge fuel" on the lengthy path to a renewable, carbon-free economy.

However, while the national-interest case may not be debatable, the issue is whether natural gas from the Marcellus Shale can be brought to market by methods that are compatible with Pennsylvania's environmental laws and regulations.

Pennsylvania has a vast array of environmental laws that apply to the exploration and production of natural gas and the state Department of Environmental Protection has reconfirmed its intention to enforce them. For example, the state has announced its intention to apply the provisions of the residual waste rules in order to regulate aspects of gas exploration and has increased the scope of its permitting authority to regulate the discharge of storm water from Marcellus Shale gas operations.

The state's regional water basin commissions also are playing an important role in reviewing projects, issuing permits and enforcing the requirements that apply to the construction and operation of these facilities.

Beyond the federal laws that affect natural gas exploration and production, these purely Pennsylvania-specific environmental laws and regulations provide the state with considerable authority to properly control the environmental aspects of Marcellus Shale operations in a manner that is unlike any other state in the union.

Several of Pennsylvania's environmental laws date back to the early 1900s, when the exploited energy reserve in Pennsylvania was coal and oil. The state has come a long way since then.

In all instances, the commonwealth's environmental laws provide for citizen input, in the review of new regulations and draft permits. If public participation and input during these stages of the process is perceived to be insufficient, agency decisions can be appealed and citizen

environmental lawsuits may be initiated where there is a concern that the state has failed to implement the environmental laws properly.

Recent enforcement actions by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection against those involved with the exploration of natural gas, and lawsuits brought by citizens and nonprofit environmental groups alleging actual or potential environmental harm resulting from certain natural gas operations in the state, have demonstrated the vitality of this important aspect of Pennsylvania's environmental regulatory environment.

As Pennsylvanians begin to realize the importance of the Marcellus Shale's natural gas to national energy independence and the state's economy, there will be increased pressure to tap these reserves. And with this pressure to exploit the Marcellus Shale, there is a perception that Pennsylvania's abundant natural resources could be threatened.

But Pennsylvania is not new to energy exploration, and its state-specific environmental laws provide a framework for the state, and its citizens, to make sure that this new economic engine for Pennsylvania's economy will not spoil our environment.

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