

UTIA Fracking Study: The Basics



Fracking is coming to Tennessee, but you can help stop it

What is this project?

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) is proposing the development of an oil and gas research project on 8636 +/- acres of university-owned forestry research land in Morgan and Scott Counties, an area commonly known as the Cumberland Forest. On March 15, 2013, the Executive Subcommittee of the State Building Commission will hold a special meeting on the UT Fracking Study. The meeting is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. CST, in Hearing Room 30 in the Legislative Plaza in Nashville.

According to the UTIA webpage, "The goal of the project is to provide baseline data to advance best management practices specific to extracting natural gas and petroleum resources from the Chattanooga shale formations common throughout East Tennessee and the region. The university would seek a lease agreement with private industry to extract the resources from its Cumberland Forest while studying the methodologies and their environmental effects."¹

So, what is fracking?

Hydraulic fracturing, aka "fracking", is a method of natural gas extraction mostly used in tight shale and coal bed methane formations. After a well is drilled, a mix of water, sand, chemicals and/or gases are injected into the shale formations at extremely high-pressures breaking up the rock allowing small bubbles of natural gas to be released from the rock and extracted at the surface. The wastewater from this process is either stored in above ground holding ponds or injected into the surface of the Earth causing problems ranging from water contamination to earthquakes.

Aren't there regulations for fracking?

In 2005, Congress granted an exemption from the Safe Water Drinking Act to any operations related to hydrologic fracturing or fracking.² Current State of Tennessee fracking regulations approved in October of 2012 only require a 100-foot horizontal separation between an oil and gas well and any stream and only a 200-foot separation from any water well or water body used for drinking water, irrigation, livestock, or commercial uses.³ Additionally, there are issues of forced pooling of mineral rights (forcing landowners to sell their mineral rights if enough landowners in a area have sold their mineral rights), inadequate well casings (cement surrounding fracking wells that is a barrier to prevent leaks) and the lack of disclosure and transparency are all major problems the current regulations.

How can I get involved and learn more?

If you want to find out more about the UTIA project and how you can get involved, contact Parker Laubach, parker@socm.org or contact Parker at 847-721-5189.

- (1) <https://ag.tennessee.edu/Pages/Gas-and-Oil-March-15.aspx>
- (2) http://www1.eere.energy.gov/femp/pdfs/epact_2005.pdf
- (3) <http://www.tcwn.org/sites/tcwn.org/files/Oil%20and%20Gas%20Rules%20%20FINAL.pdf>

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