

OPINION

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MARCELLUS WATCH | PETER MANTIUS

The LPG plan needs to stand trial

After five years of secrecy and deception, it's time to throw the bright light of day on a proposal to store liquid petroleum gas, or LPG, in abandoned unlined salt caverns next to Seneca Lake.



PETER MANTIUS

Long overdue sunlight must finally be allowed to shine on the caverns' history. To do that, the state Department of Environmental Conservation — with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's guidance — will need to order Crestwood Midstream's proposal to stand trial.

Earlier this month, the DEC issued draft conditions for the LPG storage permit in advance of an "issues conference" scheduled for Feb. 12.

At that hearing, a DEC administrative law judge will determine whether unresolved questions need to be aired in a trial setting with sworn testimony, independent expert witnesses and witness cross-exams.

Expect Crestwood to try to convince Cuomo to let it off the hook.

Crestwood knows it must avoid sworn testimony. Throughout its long campaign for permits, it has repeatedly hidden damning evidence from both the public and the regulators.

Even so, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approved in October an expansion of Crestwood's natural gas storage operations next to Seneca, and that work is now proceeding. But the DEC has jurisdiction over the LPG project, the larger and more dangerous of the two.

Crestwood's plan is to turn a profit by stuffing natural gas and LPG from Marcellus Shale fracking operations in Pennsylvania into the cheapest, riskiest type of underground storage facility in the industry — salt caverns.

The Seneca caverns are deeply flawed, bounded by layers of salt and brittle shale rock. They are subject to collapse and leakage, and the residents who live next to them face the statistically significant prospect of a catastrophic accident or a forced evacuation.

The company has repeatedly attempted to conceal that danger from the people it would put at risk. The DEC has enabled that irresponsible behavior out of fear that transparency invites controversy.

In late 2011, the agency held two public hearings

on the LPG project in a Watkins Glen school auditorium.

But they were largely for show because the DEC was withholding key information from the hundreds who showed up. The DEC still keeps key parts of the company's "reservoir suitability report" under lock and key. And while the state geologist must by law sign off on the integrity of caverns used for hydrocarbon storage, his reports — if they exist — aren't public record.

Formal requests under the Freedom of Information Law were needed to pry loose bits of truth. They revealed letters that showed that the company's own engineer had concluded in 2001 that the cavern now slated to hold liquid butane was "unusable for storage" after its roof had collapsed, leaving a giant rubble pile. He urged his boss to order the cavern plugged and abandoned. His boss agreed. So did the DEC. The cavern was plugged and abandoned.

Years later, the company redrilled the rejected cavern in response to the Marcellus Shale boom.

When the well's history leaked to the public, Crestwood rushed to patch the problem by prompting the company engineer to deny the roof collapse. He did, and the company now insists the collapse never happened, despite company documents showing a 200-foot rubble pile on the cavern's floor.

Other discrepancies raise doubts about the safety of the cavern set to hold liquid propane. The company even denied to FERC that it knew about a gigantic roof collapse in the cavern just approved for gas storage.

Crestwood must not be allowed to wiggle out of providing sworn testimony. If Cuomo lets it skip out, his permit process is a sham.

Peter Mantius is a freelance journalist from Schuylar County who follows shale gas drilling issues. He is a former reporter at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and former editor of two business weeklies in the Northeast.

WEEKLY COLUMN | SEN. TOM O'MARA

Venison donation a proud tradition

The opening of this year's regular deer hunting season means it's time for the annual reminder on one of this region's most successful traditions: the Venison Donation Coalition.



TOM O'MARA

The organization proudly states its mission this way, "The Venison Donation Coalition has been highly successful in its goal to feed the hungry ... The Coalition consists of representatives from sportsmen's clubs, non-profit organizations, regional food banks, local food pantries as well as local, state and federal agencies whose objective is to secure funding for the processing and distribution of venison to families in need."

Over the years, the Coalition sure has helped put a good meal on many tables. Millions of tables, in fact. Since 1999 the Coalition has coordinated the processing of an average of 39 tons of venison annually and provided over 4 million highly nutritious, low-fat, high-protein servings. Amazing.

And timely. Census figures in 2013 showed the state's poverty rate at its highest level since 1998, with more than three million New Yorkers living below the official poverty level. Timely, as well, because of the fast approaching holiday season, a time of giving, and more immediately, with the regular deer hunting season underway

by limited resources to address seemingly infinite demands, we're always searching for ways to encourage individual citizens to contribute to the overall quality of our communities.

It's hard to believe that it was 20 years ago when an area "Hunters for the Hungry" program was prepared to donate 400 pounds of venison for distribution to the needy and discovered that state law prevented it.

As a result, "Hunters for the Hungry" programs operating throughout New York at that time, 1993, were being told they couldn't donate over 10,000 pounds of venison to food banks and other organizations providing meals to the unemployed, shut-ins, senior citizens and other needy citizens. It just didn't make any sense. So the Legislature quickly acted to establish a program to address the appropriate health concerns and allow the donations to be made.

The venison donation program that resulted is now a broad-based partnership that includes a range of area supporters. It has facilitated the donation of venison to food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and additional not-for-profit organizations and charities that feed the poor. The response of hunters has been overwhelming. Today the Venison Donation Coalition operates in most of the state's

62 counties. Countless citizens have enjoyed nutritious meals as a result. It is, very simply, an admirable effort. While it may not readily come to mind as a community development mainstay, it surely is. You can't underestimate the spirit of commitment and giving it encourages. We will continue to develop infrastructure, promote tourism, improve schools, protect citizens, and do anything and everything possible to enhance our economic standing, but along with these fundamental responsibilities is a responsibility to the quality of life for everyone. That's what's important, appropriate and meaningful about the ongoing work of the Venison Donation Coalition. And we all can help. As the Coalition notes on its website ("Feed 4 People for Just a Buck"), the donation of just \$1 can help provide four meals. For every dollar donated, in fact, the Coalition puts 90 cents towards processing donated venison. For more information, visit the Venison Donation Coalition online at www.venisondonation.com, or call (866) 862-3337.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuylar and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



READER VIEW | JACK A. FINE

No more gravel pits in Savona

We don't need another gravel pit in Savona and Campbell.

There is a proposal to allow a construction company to develop a gravel pit off of State Route 415 that will adversely impact the environment and quality of life for the residents in Green Meadow Acres, Village of Savona and Platt Hill Road.

The pit will adversely impact our environment by polluting the air with dirt, dust, diesel fumes and noise created by the

equipment needed to mine the pit.

Property values for residents will decrease anywhere from 20-30 percent for properties located .5 to a mile from the pit.

The increased truck traffic will cause rapid deterioration of our roads as well as create a traffic menace, as trucks will exit on a curve off Route 415. With decreased property values, towns and villages will see their tax base decrease. Thus, there will be less money for road repair, a decline in

community services; less money for village beautification projects, etc.

There could be an adverse impact on the recent comprehensive plan for the Village of Savona. Some of the problems submitted by the Alfred students may not be realized because of the pollution and loss of property values caused by the development of the gravel pit.

The permit issued by the NYSDEC was done without notification of the proposal by the town

and village board of Bath, Savona and Campbell. This project will only benefit one or two people, but will upset the quality of life for hundreds.

Submit your comments to Roger T. McDonough, NYSDEC Region 8, 6274 E. Avon-Lima Road, Avon, NY 14414 or the NYSDEC in Albany at 625 Broadway, First Floor, Albany, NY 12233-1550 - phone number (518) 402-9003.

Jack A. Fine is a Savona resident.

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