**BERKS GAS TRUTH ● CLEAN WATER ACTION ● DELAWARE RIVERKEEPER NETWORK ● EARTHWORKS**

**GAS DRILLING AWARENESS COALITION OF LUZERNE COUNTY ● GAS TRUTH OF CENTRAL PA**

**GAS TRUTH OF YORK COUNTY ● LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**MOUNTAIN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION ● MURRYSVILLE MARCELLUS SHALE GROUP**

**PEACH BOTTOM CONCERNED CITIZENS GROUP ● PENNENVIRONMENT**

**PENNSYLVANIA ALLIANCE FOR CLEAN WATER AND AIR ● PIPELINE SAFETY COALITION**

**PROTECTING OUR WATERS ● RESPONSIBLE DRILLING ALLIANCE ● SIERRA CLUB PA CHAPTER**

**For Immediate Release:**

Tuesday, January 17, 2012, 11 a.m.

**Contact**: Erika Staaf, PennEnvironment, cell: (412) 491-4801

 Steve Hvozdovich, Clean Water Action: (412) 445-9675

 Nadia Steinzor, Earthworks: (315) 677-4111

 Tracy Carluccio, Delaware Riverkeeper Network: (215) 369-1188 x104

 Jeff Schmidt, Sierra Club PA Chapter: (717) 232-0101

**PA Residents, Groups, Local Officials Urge Legislature to Oppose Impact Fee Bill**

*Hundreds tell the legislature to protect local rights and public health from gas operations*

(Harrisburg) – Today, as legislators returned to Harrisburg for the first session day of 2012, hundreds of Pennsylvania residents and local officials called on state leaders to oppose the omnibus gas drilling bills, HB 1950 and SB 1100, which cleared the State House and Senate in late 2011.

As the bills head to conference committee deliberations, today’s event drew attention to major provisions in both bills that tie the hands of local elected officials on zoning decisions related to shale gas operations such as wells, pipelines, compressor stations, and chemical and waste storage.

"This was a terrible idea in 2011 and remains a terrible idea in 2012,” said Steve Hvozdovich of Clean Water Action. “Our legislators must take this opportunity and make a New Year’s resolution to protect our health, water, air, and communities by opposing any legislation that attempts to weaken or allow state takeover of municipal rights."

The groups assert that the bills’ state preemption of local decision-making and zoning is a fatal flaw that will negatively affect Pennsylvania residents’ health, environment and quality of life, and the bills’ impact fees and limited environmental provisions are too limited to make up for the local zoning tradeoff.

“This bill is the antithesis of local control and represents a serious threat to democratic decision making by Pennsylvania communities,” said Maria Payan, Director of Peach Bottom Concerned Citizens Group. “Will we be allowed to use local zoning laws to protect the public health, safety and public welfare, or will our state enact a law to accommodate the oil and gas industry and their high-paid lobbyists?”

Pennsylvania municipalities currently have the legal right to decide where and how gas development occurs. Both the Municipalities Planning Code and the State Constitution vest municipalities with the authority and responsibility to address local environmental and public resources. State Supreme Court rulings have also made it clear that the state Oil and Gas Act allows municipalities the right to use zoning codes to restrict the location of gas wells.

“The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania is appalled that elected officials are considering HB1950 and SB 1100,” said Roberta Winters, Vice President Issues and Action of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. “These bills eliminate the treasured value of ‘local control’ by pre-empting the right of municipalities to protect the health, well-being, and property of local citizens while collecting too little revenue to repair the impact of industrial level fracking on their communities. This does not reflect good government and blatantly disregards the hearts and minds of the citizens of Pennsylvania.”

The group pointed out that both bills would allow gas operations – including well pads and drill rigs – as close as 500 feet and wastewater and chemical impoundments as close as 300 feet to homes, schools, and health facilities, potentially diminishing the well-being and property values of nearby residents. Under this legislation, in many cases other types of businesses – from hair salons to light construction – could face greater restrictions on locating in a residential area that gas operations.

"The Pennsylvania General Assembly must kill HB 1950 and SB 1100. Neither versions of the Marcellus legislation provide sufficient environmental protection or funding, while both would usurp existing local government authority to protect their communities," said Jeff Schmidt, Director of Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter. "We call on every member of the House and Senate who voted in support of these bills to change his or her position. The electorate will know if their legislators voted to protect public health and the environment, or if they voted to do what out-of-state drillers want.”

###