Lawmakers consider “fracking” in North Carolina

Our efforts helped derail drilling bill

This summer, in a move supported by Environment North Carolina, Gov. Bev Perdue vetoed legislation that calls for “fracking,” a dangerous method of gas drilling that could threaten priceless land along the Deep River—and impact the drinking water supply for more than 200,000 North Carolinians.

The governor’s decision followed the receipt of thousands of emails and hundreds of phone calls from Tar Heels, many of them Environment North Carolina members, urging her to veto the short-sighted Senate Bill 709, which promotes offshore and onshore drilling while failing to create a single energy job in wind or solar power.

Unfortunately, some lawmakers in the General Assembly are now waging a campaign to override the veto. Further, they want to open the Deep River—and other spaces in central North Carolina—to fracking as early as 2012, without a full examination of how the practice could hurt drinking water or damage central North Carolina’s farms and rivers.

“Sadly, the bill isn’t dead yet,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, state director of Environment North Carolina. “We still have to sustain the governor’s veto stamp by reaching out to local lawmakers across the state.”

Fracking linked to water contamination around country

Fracking, short for hydraulic fracturing, is the process by which dangerous chemicals are mixed with large quantities of water and sand, then injected into horizontal wells at extremely high pressure, fracturing the surrounding rock and extracting natural gas.

The practice has damaged landscapes and increased air pollution near drilling sites—it’s also been linked to more than 1,000 cases of drinking water contamination across the country, according to the investigative journalism group Pro Publica.

Southern Environmental Law Center analysts estimate that if all of the state’s potential shale gas reserves are tapped, the drinking water for as many as 2.4 million North Carolinians could be impacted.

Oil and gas companies—most from outside the state—have already purchased leases to drill in Chatham, Moore and Lee counties.

A Duke study found methane contamination near fracking gas wells in Pennsylvania.

take action

Deep River.

Visit our website and tell your representatives to reject fracking in North Carolina.

www.EnvironmentNorthCarolina.org/action
To our members

There’s no doubt that North Carolina’s environment took a beating from this year’s General Assembly. But thanks to your support, Gov. Bev Perdue stood up against some of the year’s worst attacks on our air, water and open spaces.

Over the objections of the governor, lawmakers adopted a budget that slashes conservation funding and prevents the protection of green spaces next to the Blue Ridge Parkway and other key tracts of land around the state.

Unfortunately, lawmakers also overrode the governor’s veto of a bill that halts most new environmental rules.

But I’m pleased to report at least one bright spot: Together, some lawmakers and the governor were able to delay action on a bill that calls for drilling off the Outer Banks and near the Deep River. That’s progress we plan to build on in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ouzts
State Director

Environment North Carolina

Offshore wind: New moves to speed development

According to federal government data, North Carolina has more offshore wind potential than any state on the Atlantic Coast—and Gov. Bev Perdue is ramping up efforts to ensure that the state taps that potential. This June, the governor created a task force charged with speeding the development of wind turbines off the coast, noting that “the waters off the North Carolina coast have sufficient wind resources to generate about 130 percent of the state’s total energy use.”

Environment North Carolina had pushed a bill to give incentives for as much as 5,000 megawatts of offshore wind over the next 20 years, the equivalent of seven major coal-fired power plants.

“We applaud the governor’s move,” said Environment North Carolina’s Margaret Hartzell. “Gov. Perdue recognizes what too many legislators did not: Wind turbines off our coast are far better than oil rigs for cutting pollution and reducing our dependence on oil—not to mention creating jobs.”

Governor vetoes bill calling for drill rigs off OBX

In a critical move to protect North Carolina’s coast, Gov. Bev Perdue vetoed a Senate bill that calls for drilling off the Outer Banks and the rest of our coastline. House leaders, fearing they lacked the votes to override the governor’s veto, delayed consideration of the bill.

Erroneously titled the “Energy Jobs Act,” the bill took no steps toward wind or solar power, or energy conservation. Instead, it focused narrowly on drilling for oil and gas off North Carolina’s beaches and speeding the controversial practice of “fracking” in North Carolina.

Environment North Carolina studies show that the coastal fishing and tourism industries, which employ 67,000 North Carolinians, bring in four times as much revenue as could be derived from oil and gas deposits offshore.

How do you want to be remembered?

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment North Carolina.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or email PlannedGiving@EnvironmentNorthCarolina.org.
North Carolina’s solar resources are immense—and, despite encouraging progress, largely untapped.

The right policies, coupled with ambitious goals, could increase North Carolina’s solar capacity threefold over the next decade, according to a new Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center report.

Thanks in part to North Carolina’s 2007 goals for renewable energy reliance and incentives to install panels, solar capacity in North Carolina has increased dramatically over the last five years.

**North Carolina ranks ninth in nation**

Today, the state ranks ninth in the nation—back in 2006, North Carolina lagged behind most states, ranking in the bottom ten. But due to favorable policies, the state solar market grew five times faster than the national average.

But without stronger policies to boost solar power production, North Carolina’s growth in solar energy is poised to plateau. In fact, last year, solar power accounted for only a tiny fraction of a percent of the state’s electricity supply.

Today, as utilities account for about 85 percent of North Carolina’s solar installations, the state has significant room for growth in the residential and commercial solar sectors.

New Jersey, a state one-sixth the size of North Carolina, installed nearly five times more solar energy per capita last year.

**The policies we need**

Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center’s report outlines three critical policies that could give further rise to solar power in North Carolina: Doubling the state’s solar requirement; enabling third-party solar companies to enter into solar power purchase agreements; and improving the state’s “net metering” laws, which currently discourage small and medium-sized businesses from investing in solar power.

Previous Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center research has shown that North Carolina has the potential to get at least 14 percent of its energy from solar power, which could create as many as 28,000 jobs.

“With four hours of peak sun per day, North Carolina has twice as much sun as Germany, the world’s solar leader,” said Elizabeth Ouzts, Environment North Carolina State Director. “With the right policies in place, we’ll be well on our way to 100,000 solar roofs in ten years.”

**A plan to get North Carolina off oil**

A comprehensive strategy to get off oil can reduce oil dependence in North Carolina by 51 million barrels in 2030—more than a 33 percent reduction from 2008, according to a new Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center report.

“The cost of our oil dependence has grown out of control, from the outrageous price we pay at the pump, to the pollution in the air that we breathe, to catastrophic accidents like the Gulf oil spill and our contribution to global warming,” said Margaret Hartzell, Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center Advocate. “This report shows how we can get North Carolina closer to the day when we no longer fear the impact of Big Oil on our paychecks, our environment, and public health.”

The policies recommended in the report include setting fuel efficiency standards that make 60-mpg cars the norm by 2025, doubling access to public transportation, and enacting policies to encourage telecommuting, smart growth, and biking and walking.

“A hundred years of energy and transportation policies that favor Big Oil companies have made our country deeply dependent on their dirty and dangerous product,” said Hartzell. “Breaking their grip on our country is going to take time and the sustained commitment of policymakers and advocates, which is why we need to start now.”

Environment North Carolina is calling on leaders at both the state and federal level to enact comprehensive plans to reduce oil consumption.
Despite cuts, continued efforts to save Blue Ridge

This June, the General Assembly cut land conservation funding by 85 percent and imposed new restrictions on the state’s premiere conservation program. The new rules bar the fund from protecting several open spaces through land acquisition, including vulnerable land along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In the run-up to the vote, Environment North Carolina staff and supporters gathered thousands of signatures and organized hundreds of phone calls from constituents in support of open space protection. And, as the General Assembly and governor finalized the budget, Gov. Bev Perdue received more constituent calls, emails and postcards concerning environmental issues than any other aspect of the spending plan.

Looking ahead to the next legislative session, Environment North Carolina will continue to build long-term support for conserving the Parkway’s surrounding lands, and other critical green spaces around the state.