

Editorial: Drilling for options

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An application filed last month with the state Department of Environmental Conservation may provide a way for companies to engage in fracking for natural gas despite the state's ban on the practice.

Snyder Farm Group wants to develop a 53-acre natural gas well in Halsey Valley, Tioga County. The five families who make up the group own leased land on which Tioga Energy Partners would like to drill for natural gas.

At the end of June, the Cuomo administration declared that hydraulic fracturing for natural gas would not be permitted in New York state. This process rescues the gas released by rock formations broken apart by pressurized liquid.

The conventional method of fracking uses water, sand and other chemicals. This is what has been banned in New York state.

“The Cuomo administration's fracking ban centered on the risks hydraulic fracturing posed to drinking water supplies,” according to a July 28 story on CapitalNewYork.com. “It examined the amount of water that would be required from local supplies as well as the vast number of trucks needed to transport it.”

The application filed by Snyder Farm Group and Tioga Energy Partners, however, proposed to use gelled propane and sand rather than water. Representatives of the two groups said this bypasses the state ban and should be permitted.

Some opponents of hydrofracking agree that using gelled propane instead of water could be a way for energy companies to proceed with their plans to drill for natural gas. They are not pleased with the apparent loophole and are urging environmental groups to push for a blanket ban on all forms of liquid fracking.

But after a seven-year review, what concerned state environmental authorities the most was the use of water. This is the type of fracking that was banned, and now some groups are using these rules to find alternative means of drilling for natural gas.

The Cuomo administration's recent ban on hydrofracking was unfortunate, as we have previously argued on this page. New York state desperately needs jobs, and drilling for natural gas would provide plenty of them.

In addition, we as a state import natural gas from places like Pennsylvania. It's hypocritical of us to benefit from a form of energy derived from a process that we now ban. Natural gas is a cleaner source of fuel and is plentiful in the southern part of our state.

Energy groups should vigorously pursue proposals to use gelled propane to drill for natural gas rather than water. The state ruled on what specific type fracking was banned, and it should live with its decision.

(Johnson News Service)