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Environmental Impacts of Conventional Oil and Gas Well Development on the Allegheny National Forest

The Allegheny National Forest (ANF) in northwestern Pennsylvania is the state's only Federal forest. The ANF comprises 513,000 acres; approximately 92% of the oil, gas and minerals on the ANF are privately owned, it being the decision of the Federal government to purchase only surface parcels when the Forest was assembled in the early part of the 20th century.

The ANF is located in the heart of Pennsylvania's conventional oil region. Drake's well, drilled in 1859, is located 15 miles from the western boundary of the ANF. The ANF region remains a vital producer of conventional oil today, supplying much of the feedstock for products refined at the Bradford, Pennsylvania ARG refinery (the world's oldest continuously operating refinery employing approximately 400 Pennsylvania citizens).

Since 1859 tens of thousands of conventional oil and gas wells have been drilled upon the lands which now make up the ANF. The ANF estimates that today there are about 8,000 wells currently in production on the ANF. Despite this long history of oil and gas development upon the ANF the streams, trees and other treasured resources of the ANF have prospered.

Of the 2,126 miles of mapped streams within the ANF proclamation boundary, an area of 720,000 acres, fully 72% are rated as high quality or exceptional value for water quality. Moreover, the Forest Service in 2007 characterized the water quality in the ANF as "among the highest in the state." Further, the Forest Service estimated in the 2007 ANF Land and Resource Management Plan ("2007 ANF Forest Plan") "...that oil and gas clearing (including associated oil and gas access roads) currently occupy 1.4% of the ANF land base." That percentage amounts to approximately 7,000 acres of converted land from a 513,000 acre land base. These facts can be verified at the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the 2007 ANF Forest Plan at pages 3-26 to 3-28 and at page 3-163.

In November, 2014 the US Forest released its five-year Monitoring and Evaluation Report for the ANF for the period from 2008 through 2013. It focuses on oil and gas development during that period. The 2014 ANF Monitoring Report concludes that "The majority of streams on the ANF are meeting state water quality standards. Impairments are most frequently related to acid deposition or acidity from natural sources." Of particular note is the Clarion University study

undertaken to compare the results of oil and gas development on benthic macroinvertebrate communities in a high development watershed as compared to a very low to no-development watershed. The study reviewed detailed data from a 2010 survey as well as results of studies conducted in the early 1980's, 1990s, and 2008. The Report concluded that these macroinvertebrate studies "...*did not detect a negative impact to water quality* from this development" (emphasis added).