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## Experts: Drillers must coordinate to prevent sprawl

By Timothy Puko

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Gas wells, compressor stations and pipelines springing up across the state could chew up as much land as the strip mine industry once did, a Penn State University researcher said.

That's why, five years into the state's drilling boom, it's important to take steps soon to help keep gas drilling development from sprawling out of control, said Patrick Drohan, a soil, forest and fish expert studying drilling at Penn State.

Those steps include things such as consolidating pipeline paths, coordinating with logging and farm operations, and forming regional planning groups, researchers say.

"These are simple things. This is not rocket science," said David Yoxtheimer of Penn State's Marcellus Center for Outreach and Research, which hosted more than 75 researchers from at least four states at a conference last week in Moon. "In some cases, these ideas are being realized, but there are a lot of other opportunities out there."

Land planning and control are hot-button issues in Pennsylvania this week, because the state's gas drilling rules under Act 13 face a major court challenge.

Lawmakers approved uniform conditions covering the state's more than 2,000 municipalities, and several Western Pennsylvania communities are among plaintiffs suing in Commonwealth Court to overturn the rules. Judges will hear arguments in the case on Wednesday.

Industry representatives said they are sharing rights-of-way and infrastructure.

"There's definitely environmental and economic advantages of joining forces," said Andrew Paterson, a technical expert at the industry group Marcellus Shale Coalition.

Researchers said better planning among drillers, with government and citizen involvement, are key to realizing a lot of the best recommendations. Collaboration can put multiple pipelines into one right-of-way and ensure drilling happens at times when vegetation is most likely to regrow.

Pipelines are a big part of the issue, said David Ball, a Peters councilman who is one of the plaintiffs suing to overturn Act 13. The rules don't address pipelines, but other rules restrict how much say municipalities have on where and when drilling can happen and where compressor stations can go. The towns are suing, in part, to ensure they have a day-to-day say on managing.

"Why can't the gas companies share utilities?" Ball asked, comparing pipelines to utility poles that telephone and power companies share. "All of them see transmission as a major source of revenue."

The timing of drilling can make some sharing difficult, Paterson said. The industry shares widely; independent pipeline companies typically hold contracts to take gas from multiple production companies, he said. Other companies are starting to share water pipelines and equipment in central and northern

### About Timothy Puko



Timothy Puko 412-320-7991  
Business Writer  
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

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to share water pipelines and equipment in central and northern Pennsylvania, industry officials and researchers said.

"The clearest thing that the people of Pennsylvania need to recognize is that most of the companies are doing what's required by the law. In doing the next step, some of the companies will voluntarily do what's available," Drohan said.

"But other companies will say 'We're already doing what's required by the law, so there's no reason for us to go the next step.' "

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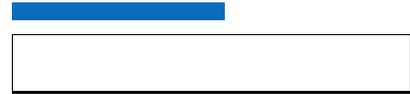
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