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Gas drilling in eastern Ohio raises concern about water supply

Associated Press

COLUMBUS — Drillers hoping to retrieve gas through Utica shale wells in eastern Ohio are drawing water for their operations from ponds and streams or purchasing it from public reservoirs, worrying environmentalists who say it might endanger water supplies for the public and wildlife if there's not enough water for everyone.

The drilling process known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, injects millions of gallons of chemical-laced water into the earth at high pressure to free gas.

The geology of eastern Ohio makes it rich in resources such as propane, butane and ethane but short on groundwater for that drilling, The Columbus Dispatch reported.

So drilling operations are finding water where they can. Chesapeake Energy signed an agreement with the city of Steubenville last month to take up to 700,000 gallons of water a day from a city reservoir of water from the Ohio River, at a cost of \$5 for every 1,000 gallons.

That brought in about

\$30,000 for the city after the company took about 6 million gallons during a two-week period in late February and early March.

"It's a great deal," city Law Director Gary Repella said. "We're not spending any money to treat the water, and it's not going to disrupt our system. We can draw as much as we want."

The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District is considering requests from a dozen companies seeking to draw water from six eastern Ohio reservoirs it controls.

Some environmentalists, fearful of the repercussions of the growing water demand, aren't sure the conservancy district should allow that.

"There isn't enough water to go around," said Lea Harper, a member of the Southeast Ohio Alliance to Save Our Water.

The Muskingum Watershed's conservation chief said the district would ask the U.S. Geological Survey to help determine how much extra water is in the area but might approve requests for reservoir water in the meantime if there's no clear threat to wildlife.

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