Meet the Monitor: Terri Davin

November 2013

MEET TERRI DAVIN OF GREENE COUNTY

As Terri and I sit down to lunch, it is clear that we stand out from the other patrons. Surrounding us are bulky men wearing greasy jumpsuits – all with name tags, some with ‘Halliburton’ written across the back. Terri is unphased and reminds me that coal has historically been the primary industry in Greene County, and that natural gas extraction is now hot on the scene. It’s easy to see the presence of these industries in the community – from the billboards touting Range Resource’s dedication to well pad safety to the hundreds of large trucks that roar past her organization’s basement office.

Terri is a founding member of the Greene County Watershed Alliance (GCWA), a twelve-year-old organization that was born out of a Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Growing Greener Grant specifically allocated to cultivate watershed associations in the area.

The depth of Terri’s local knowledge is evident as she describes local streams, mines, and gas wells. Terri has lived in Greene County for 45 years and has witnessed the ever growing impact of natural resource extraction to the landscape, the economy, and the community. She explains the historical control that the coal industry has maintained over the local people, “A place takes on the personality of the leadership,” she explains, “and the coal industry has had leadership influence in this community for years.” Greene County has one of the longest legacies of coal mining in the U.S. The region has historically been economically dependent on the coal industry, and currently produces 50% of Pennsylvania’s coal through a process called longwall mining. However, that economic driver carries heavy environmental impacts with it, including poor air quality, land subsidence, and acid mine drainage.

Now, the region has become one of Pennsylvania’s top producing counties for natural gas. Greene County and its neighbor, Washington County are the only places in the world where longwall mining and shale gas drilling occur side-by-side.

Terri’s concern for the impacts of these types of resource extraction impacts on the local community motivates her involvement. She currently monitors 12 sites in her area – most are located in High Quality watersheds. These sites became priority when she discovered that Alpha (a local coal company) had submitted a permit three times for slurry ponds in the middle of Exceptional Value watersheds. Much of Terri’s local knowledge comes from the time that she spends connecting with other people and exploring the region. “I like focusing on being out in the community- walking the hills and streams…I’m not much of a desk person,” she explains. Her energy seems to be endless, and she spends much of her time in the field rather than in the GCWA’s office.

TERRI QUICK FACTS

- Coordinator for Greene County Watershed Alliance
- Member of Friends of Dunkard Creek & Wheeling Creek Watershed Conservancy
- 12 Shale Gas Monitoring Sites
- Has partnered with 3 universities for water quality testing
- As of 11/6/13, Greene County had: 559 wells drilled; 70 violations

As we chat over lunch, Terri’s phone buzzes. As she glances at her text message, she asks me if I know Pam Judy from Carmichaels. She says that the DEP is on Pam’s property today to address her health concerns from a compressor station 800 feet from her home. In a small, rural area like Greene, word of mouth is the primary source of information on the dynamic industry of shale gas. Neighbors and friends swap updates and keep each other informed.
However, as the natural gas industry moved into the region, some of those long-existing neighbor relationships came to an abrupt end. Communities were torn apart by their differing views on shale gas—those who supported the industry, those who leased, those who opposed, and those who refused to sign. Terri expresses her frustration with the divisions within the community, and people who chose to side with a new industry over people they have known for years. She asks, “Why do people think that gas company is a better neighbor than the person who watched their house for them?”

Terri has pursued additional projects for GCWA outside of the ALLARM Shale Gas Monitoring Program. She has collaborated with 3 Rivers Quest (3RQ) of West Virginia University and Heidelberg University in Ohio. Her collaboration with 3RQ has allowed her to receive a suite of laboratory testing on multiple streams in her area. The partnership with Heidelberg University focuses on drinking water contamination— one of the most publicized concerns with natural gas drilling. Terri receives seven vials to collect water from taps or springs, which she then mails to the university. There, they are tested for Volatile Organic Compounds, metals, and nitrates.

Terri’s enthusiasm has enabled the GCWA to continuously build on its existing projects and methods. Her energy is sure to continue to inspire future environmental endeavors and additional volunteers along the way.

ALLARM has worked with Terri for three years and looks forward to continuing collaboration.

Greene County: Longwall Mining

The longwall mining method is only used in Pennsylvania in Greene and Washington counties. In longwall, a large block of the coal seam is continuously removed. Pillars line the large lengths of coal that will be mined. These strips can be up to 1500 feet wide and two miles long. A large machine grinds and shears the coal from the wall face onto conveyor belts. There are no coal supports (pillars) left behind to prevent the overlying land from collapsing. Hydraulic supports hold up the roof temporarily as the shearer progresses. As it moves forward, mine roof collapses behind it. This mining technique is highly efficient, but also environmentally invasive and damaging.

Longwall mining can produce a variety of environmental impacts. One of the most common impacts is land subsidence. After the coal seam is removed, the land falls in on itself. This can destroy streams, create landslides, and ruin homes’ foundations. In areas where longwall mining has taken place, depopulation often occurs as peoples’ homes become unsafe and their land is degraded.

Above is a shearer that grinds the coal away from the coal seam. (Brittanica)

For more information visit our online toolkit at: blogs.dickinson.edu/marcellusmonitoring or email Katie Tomsho at tomshok@dickinson.edu