

# Drilling for natural gas in the wilds of Lycoming County

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By MIKE REUTHER - mreuther@sungazette.com , Williamsport Sun-Gazette

TROUT RUN - To reach the Seneca Resources drilling sites north of Trout Run is to negotiate a series of winding, narrow unpaved roads through rugged mountainous and forested terrain.

While bumping along inside a vehicle driven by Seneca Manager Rob Boulware, one passes occasional signs of civilization - the rustic cabin, a deer hunter or two attired in blazing oranges and the occasional security checkpoints where a man or woman waves to us from inside a shed.

At the top of the mountain the landscape opens up and before us is a drill pad.

## Article Photos



MIKE REUTHER/Sun-Gazette

Equipment rests at drilling site for Seneca Resources on a winding backroad in northern Lycoming County.

There's the well - a single narrow edifice pointed toward the heavens.

Trailers run along the perimeter of the drill pad, temporary homes for workers who put in 21-day stretches of work.

"These are 24-hour operations," explained Boulware.

It looks like a messy operation on this December day. It's muddy around the drill pad but of bigger concern is the hydro-fracking.

Otherwise known as hydraulic fracturing, it consists of the injection of highly pressurized fracking fluids into the Marcellus Shale deep within the Earth, allowing for the release of natural gas from the rock.

Concerns have been raised repeatedly of the possibility of natural gas leaks during the drilling process.

Seneca Resources Drilling Supervisor Barry Loflin has heard this before.

"All precautions are taken," said Loflin, a Mississippian with a decided southern drawl and a face displaying years of outdoor work.

Yes, leaks and spills can occur.

"We keep fluids away from the environment," he said. "We catch erosion runoff."

A liner at the drill pad provides containment for the drilling operations.

Just down below the drill pad wrapped against the hillside can be found long continuous dark tubes.

That's part of the erosion and sedimentation controls put into place.

"That is all done before work occurs on the pad," Loflin said.

**Seneca worked with New Pig Well Pad Containment to place the liners and containment barriers necessary for being in compliance.**

**And they continue to work with the Tipton, Pa.-based company to ensure everything is working as it should.**

"We have taken every precaution," said Boulware.

Seneca and drilling partner Ensign Drilling this fall installed a gas engine at the site to power a liquified natural gas-fueled drilling rig to help reduce the environmental impact of energy production.

Natural gas rigs can result in lower fuel costs and reduced emission power generating capabilities, Boulware noted.

After drilling is finished at a pad site, Seneca tries to ensure that not much of a footprint is left, he added.

Many people have questioned the safety and environmental impacts of the natural gas industry.

But industry officials have made it clear that well sites will be part of the landscape of north central Pennsylvania for the foreseeable future.

And they insist safety and minimizing impacts will be part of it.

**"I'd say considerations with safety are above most industries," said Beth Powell, managing director of New Pig's Well Pad Containment Division.**

**She noted that industry officials work with sportsmen's groups to reach the best practices for maintaining the integrity of the environment.**