



The League of Women Voters Washington County



February - March, 2008, VOL. 53, ISSUE 12.

Calendar

Feb. 11, Mon., Board Meeting, Joyce Hale's home 285 W. Cleburn St., Fayetteville, 6:30.

Feb. 15, Fri., Deadline for Women's History Banquet nominations

Feb. 20, Wed., Monthly Member Meeting, Fayetteville Shale State Study Consensus, Fayetteville Public Library, 6:00.

March 10, Mon., Board Meeting, Joyce Hale's home 285 W. Cleburn St., Fayetteville, 6:30.

March 26, Wed., Monthly Member Meeting, Local Program Planning, Karen Rollet-Crocker's home 951 Pembroke Road 7:00 p.m. Wine and hors d'oeuvres shared by attendees.

March 31, Mon., Women's History Month Banquet, Clarion Inn, Fayetteville, 6:00. Ticket deadline is March 24. Call Mary Bess Mulhollan at 443-7333 for reservations.

From Joyce's Desk

If you were unable to attend the Fayetteville Shale Forum on Jan. 23, you missed a good opportunity to hear a different perspective of gas drilling in Arkansas than the usual economic projections. This has not only been a good project to learn more about an important development in Arkansas, but it has given a unifying purpose for all the Leagues resulting in the opportunity to know individuals better. A tour of drilling operations and completed wells around the Clinton, AR area on Jan. 15th gave everyone a chance to see the scale of activity. A flurry of emails and more visits have strengthened our understanding of the issue and prepared us to deliberate the study questions for a consensus position.

The success of the forum was the result of extensive planning. I owe special thanks to Rob Leflar and co-sponsor Sierra Club for attention to agenda details and help in bringing a professional panel together. I also appreciate Barbara Farley for her many hours of research and recommendations of reference materials, Mary Alice Serafini for overseeing the setup, Jim Bemus for video recording and the technicians who manned the necessary electronics, Marion and Bill Orton who spent an unbelievable amount of time editing the videos into the DVD, Libby Wheeler and Nancy McCartney for helping with the buffet for our guests, Benton County League members for providing refreshments and greeting attendees, Sally Kelley for posting Fayetteville Shale reference materials on our web page, and especially the panelists who showed great interest and support of the project with their materials and advice. But perhaps the most enjoyable for me was a chance to spend a morning with my daughter, Kelly Zega, while she waved her computer graphics magic over our program to give it a professional look. It has been a pleasure to work with such a supportive group!

Fayetteville Shale Study and Consensus

Through the insistence of League of Women Voters members in Fairfield Bay, a state wide League study has brought new insight on development of gas shale along with its tax and environmental consequences. The 2-hour Fayetteville Shale Forum was video recorded and will be shown on CAT. Scheduling is incomplete at this time but an email alert will go out to the membership to inform about viewing times. Copies of the DVD are available to those who wish to learn about this energy bonanza. Please contact Joyce Hale for more information (joyhale43@sbcglobal.net or 527-2777).

The subject of gas drilling in Arkansas may not immediately create interest for everyone. However, a deeper look at its implications for Arkansas, the amount of legislative activity it will generate and possibilities for tax reform reveal a compelling topic. Our web page references at <http://www.lwvarwc.org/fayshalestudy.htm> give a good background of the subject. The study profile and consensus questions are posted there as well and should be reviewed before attending the consensus meeting. It will take place at the Fayetteville Library at 6:00 p.m., February 20. All members are urged to attend.

Report: Ground Water and Surface Water Management: study to update the Statement of Position for the League of Women Voters of the State of Arkansas

The League of Women Voters of Washington County sponsored a panel discussion about Onsite Water Treatment Systems: Impacts on Water Quality, Land Development, and Health, Safety and Welfare of the Public on December 19th at the Fayetteville Public Library.

The following is a summary of the LWVAR Statement of Position on Ground Water and Surface Water Management and the information gathered at the panel discussion.

Statement of Position

The League adopted a position on ground water in 1985, and in 1989 started working for the establishment of a comprehensive water code for Arkansas. In 1999 the League voted to update the ground water study and expand the LWV position to include surface water. In 2001, the League supported a position on water management. A summary of the current LWVAR statement of position can be found on the League Arkansas State web site, www.lwv-arkansas.org. Concerns are protection, conservation, and development of water resources and the need for a comprehensive water plan. Goals include maintaining water quality and preventing contamination of aquifers and surface water. Suggested strategies are use of monitoring systems, creating a comprehensive water agency, and enforcement of standards along with research, education, and requiring financial responsibility by polluters.

Current study: Onsite Water Treatment Systems: Impacts on Water Quality, Land Development, and Health, Safety and Welfare of the Public

Growth of population in small communities and rural areas has led to new technologies of sewage disposal across the United States and the state of Arkansas. Traditionally, sewage disposal has been through (1) home based septic systems and (2) municipal sewer plants. It is estimated that 10 to 20% (some sources say 50%) of home based septic systems have failed without their owners knowing about it. When these systems fail, raw sewage flows through soil, subsoil, and geologic layers into ground water and also leaches into springs, lakes and other water bodies. The only other option has been municipal sewer plants that are miles away from residences in rural areas. Mayors, health departments, environmental quality engineers, state and county agencies, and private developers have been wrestling with developing new types of onsite community maintained systems for small towns and suburban communities. These systems treat sewage and distribute the water directly into the ground through a drip irrigation system that grows grass cover. According to supporters of this system, it allows local recycling of water rather than sewage treatment that allows water to flow outside the community into rivers where it eventually ends up in the ocean.

Northwest Arkansas is an example of an area that has had a number of 'community sewage system' permits granted by ADEQ. Benton County has 10 and Washington County has 13. Not all have been constructed.

Local environmental organizations such as The Nature Conservancy are very concerned about the need to keep raw sewage out of the karst limestone geology so that springs, underground streams and the water table are not polluted. Careful water treatment methods will conserve rare species such as the cavefish that are found in Benton County and northern Washington County. A Karst Area Sensitivity Map for Northwest Arkansas has been developed to show areas that are most in need of Best Management Practices. In addition, the Arkansas Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has published a Community Best Management Practices for Conservation of the Cave Springs Cave Recharge Zone (June 2005). It is recommended for all karst zones. These two documents are available on the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Council website, www.nwarpc.com.

The following questions were developed by LWVWC for the panelists:

COMMUNITY/ CLUSTER/ STEP SYSTEMS

- What effect on land planning will these systems have?
- How do these systems work?
- Are they better than individual septic systems and why?
- What kind of maintenance and management is necessary?
- Under what conditions will they fail, and what is the result?

- What permitting and inspection processes are necessary?
- How will we know what is the general level of performance and reliability of
- these alternative wastewater systems in our area?

What effect on land planning will these systems have?

How do these systems work?

Fred Jack, Mayor of Bethel Heights, pointed out that his community did not believe that they could get a permit for a traditional sewer plant, due to pollution problems in the Illinois River watershed. These problems are potentially going to end up in a court case with the state of Oklahoma. This was why he developed the community water treatment system for his town. Environmentally, he thinks that his system that cleans up the water for 450 connections and puts it back into a drip irrigation system that grows 7 cuttings of hay is good water conservation.

Are they better than individual septic systems and why?

What kind of maintenance and management is necessary?

Tom Bartlett of AquaTech Systems, a company that specializes in decentralized wastewater systems and management, described the difference between residential septic systems and community wastewater systems. He pointed out that the EPA has approved decentralized sewage systems as the next water quality infrastructure. He also noted that community water systems clean water as well as large municipal systems. Also, they are environmentally responsible, with 100% reuse of the water. As an example, the system at Cave Springs irrigates a local golf course with 700,000 gallons a day.

Maintenance and management should be done with qualified operators who are certified. In answer to a question from the audience, Mr. Bartlett said if a housing development is started and homes are not sold, Arkansas Act 832 requires that the developer give financial assurance to ADEQ that the system will continue to function. If the developer or POA ceases to exist, Aquatech takes over the responsibility. It was unclear if this was a legal responsibility, although the state permit is renewed every five years and financial assurance is required at that time.

Under what conditions will they fail, and what is the result?

John Gray, the Mayor of Greenland, discussed the potential problems of this technology. First, he feels that it enables and encourages urban sprawl. This is not a good idea for Northwest Arkansas, since it is already suffering overdevelopment. Second, he thinks

that this complex system could have equipment failure. Third, there could be management failure. And fourth, there could be Property Owner Association failure due to lack of funding for maintenance.

In summary, Mr. Gray thinks that there are a lot of things that can go wrong. He is of the opinion that professionals who run the city sewer plants are likely to make less mistakes. He believes that Greenland should stick with the Fayetteville city sewer system for the foreseeable future because it is a known factor.

What permitting and inspection processes are necessary?

How will we know what is the general level of performance and reliability of these alternative wastewater systems in our area?

Henry Insua, ADEQ Engineer from the Permitting Section, described the permit process. This requires a 'Waste Management Plan', a description of the organization/builder (if private), and a financial assurance statement that is good for 5 years. The Permitting Section then issues a public notice for 10 days. If there is no disagreement from the public, then there is a Technical Review report and a draft of a proposed permit. The Permitting Section then issues a second public notice for 30 days. If there are no comments, the ADEQ issues a final permit. If there are objections or comments, the Permitting Section considers them and may call a Public Hearing. Typically, the permit is issued in 90 days, but can take longer if there is disagreement or public concern. The Health Department also processes a permit, although this permit was not covered in the panel discussion.

Alison West, ADEQ Field Inspector, described the inspection process, which includes a check list of working equipment, signage, vegetative cover, and records of inspection of water quality and polluting material that needs to be discarded and transported away from the site.

From this ADEQ description, it was not clear how the performance and reliability of these alternative wastewater systems is successfully working in the region and state. An audience question raised the issue of avoiding water quality problems, especially in the case of electric power failure. In answer, Fred Jack noted that his system at Bethel Heights has major backup systems for pumps and electric generation. Also, each house has a 500 gallon reserve tank, and Henry Insua noted that ADEQ does review this reserve capacity. However, ADEQ does not require backup for the complete community onsite water system.

Additional information

Washington County has rules and regulations regarding community sewer systems which are required after the Arkansas Health Department and the Arkansas Department of

Environmental Quality approves the design. Rhonda Hulse, Public Utility and Assistant Grants Administrator, Washington County, told the audience that many of the requirements are parallel to those of the state agencies.

A question from the audience arose about the permit requirements for composting toilets and grey water systems. This is not permitted, but should be considered, since it is a clean, non-polluting system that supports conservation.

WOMEN'S HISTORY DINNER – March 31st, 6:00 p.m. at the Clarion Inn in Fayetteville. The doors will be open at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are \$18.00 and may be purchased from Mary Bess Mulhollan, phone 442-7333 or e-mail marybess@cox.net, 3917 E. Caston Dr., Fayetteville, AR 72701. Checks should be written to Women In History.

The dinner honors special women who live in Washington County. This is the 10th Anniversary of the dinners. Each year representatives from 8 organizations, whose memberships are mostly women form a committee to committee review the nominations and chooses four women who are to be honored at the dinner.

Nominations may be made by anyone. Forms may be obtained by calling Nancy Mays at 571-4894 or e-mailing nkmays@sbcgloblal.net. They must be in no later than Feb. 15th to be considered. Guidelines for nominations are as follows:

1. Should live in Washington County.
2. Has made a difference in the lives of others in Washington County with her activities in the community.
3. Has been a leader in the community; has contributed in the past and continues to be of service in the present.
4. Has made contributions beyond her employment.
5. Has rendered service over a period of time.
6. Is a role model to all ages (young and older).
7. Is able to attend dinner and speak for fives minutes.

Additional Considerations by Committee:

Each year, honorees will be chosen from varied fields of endeavors – civic organizations, health, religion, social services, education.

Diversity is encouraged in the selection of the honorees.

Dear League Members, here is the call to Council. My only addition is to suggest that LWVWC members take Friday to come to Little Rock, enjoy the many places and things there are to explore and we can all gather Friday night with people from across the State to hash out issues and socialize before Saturday's meeting. Thank you LWVWC for moving the Fayetteville Shale Gas Drilling education forward at a critical moment for the state of Arkansas. You make us all proud - let's keep the energy going. Mary Alice, President, LWVAR

Call to Council

The purpose of Council is to provide Local League members and Members-at-Large with updates on state study items. Council 26 of the League of Women Voters of Arkansas will convene in Little Rock at the John Gould Fletcher Library (823 North Buchanan Street, 501-663-5457) beginning at 9:00 am on Saturday April 26, 2008. Members of the LWVAR Board of Directors will meet at the state office from 1:00 to 5:00 pm on Friday April 25.

Hotel reservations for Friday April 25, 2008 can be made at the Courtyard Little Rock West, 10900 Financial Centre Park, 501-227-6000 on or before April 4, 2008 to receive the conference rate of \$89 for a double room and \$179 for a suite to sleep three. Reservations are made by calling 1-800-321-2211 or 501-227-6000. A credit card is needed to hold your reservation. Board members and guests will caucus at dinner on Friday evening (location to be announced).

Council highlights include updates on the Fayetteville Shale Natural Gas Drilling Study and updates on 2007-2009 program areas such as conservation easements, water quality, and the severance tax. Resource tables will be made available to display League Voters and other publications and materials.

LWVAR Council 26

April 26, 2008

Agenda

Morning

9:00 - 9:30 Registration

9:30 - 10:30 Call to Order

Report on Fayetteville Natural Gas Drilling Study

10:45 - 11:45 Business Meeting

Noon - 1:15 Lunch and Speaker

Afternoon

1:30 - 2:30 Speaker

2:30 - 3:30 Speaker

3:45 Adjourn

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OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

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Nonprofit Organization

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