

Cathy Becker

Wayne National Forest Fracking Strategy Session

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Nationwide & Ohio Farm Bureau 4-H Center

2201 Fred Taylor Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43210

Last semester I helped to organize a meeting of a cross-section of organizations and interested parties about how to counter fracking in Wayne National Forest. The meeting got a great turnout of about 50 people, but afterwards everyone basically did their own thing with little coordination. Despite our protests, the Bureau of Land Management did auction 17 parcels in the Marietta unit of Wayne National Forest to oil and gas companies for fracking on December 13.

Over the holiday break, I was on a phone call with a few other people for the Ohio Sierra Club's Forest and Public Lands Committee, which has been dealing with the issue of fracking in Wayne National Forest for a long time. They have met with the regional forest manager several times and were on the team that put together responses to the draft and final Environmental Assessment. After the December auction, they worked with other organizations to [file a lawsuit](#).

During the phone call, some people thought it would be a good idea to have a follow-up meeting like the one we had last October with a cross-section of groups and interested parties, so we could regroup now that the first auction had taken place. I had heard the same wishes through social media groups from some of the people who had attended, so I decided to organize this.

Over Christmas week, I found the online room reservation portal for the facility where we had held the first meeting and reserved January 26, 2017, for a meeting organized by Ohio Sierra Club. Only a few days later, I got an invitation for an event sponsored by Sierra Club Central Ohio Group in the same room on the same time and date! My reservation had not gotten onto the calendar yet, so they reserved the room at the same time, and started advertising their event before the reservation had been confirmed. What's more, when we finally got hold of the room managers, they thought two people were reserving the room for the same event, not realizing it was two different events. After some consultation with the director of Ohio Sierra Club, I decided to give them the room on January 26, and I moved my meeting date to January 17.

With that, I started working to publicize the event. It had a lot of widespread interest. A new group called United Citizens Action Network was forming with the idea of trying to create a movement similar to the veterans at Standing Rock to protect the Wayne. The organizers were veterans and had gotten the participation of several students from Kenyon College.

I also wanted to make sure I had representatives of various organizations at the meeting. The director of Ohio Sierra Club was on board and got one of the co-chairs of the Forests and Public Lands group to come. I tried to get someone from Ohio Environmental Council, but despite their attendance at the meeting last October and their action alerts about fracking in the Wayne, they did not seem interested in sending anyone to this meeting. Athens County Frack Action Network was in, as was Columbus Community Bill of Rights. After posting the meeting event page around social media, we got almost 100 signed up to attend and almost 600 saying they were interested. Unfortunately I could not get either leader of Ohio Revolution, which had organized the previous meeting, to attend. One was out of the country and the other had just started a new job. So while they led the last meeting, I would be doing this one by myself.

Thankfully I got some help from a couple of executive committee members from Sierra Club Central Ohio Group. This was not their fight, since the Wayne is not in Central Ohio, but they still showed up and helped me with sign-in sheets and with dealing with a couple of disruptive people during the meeting. I also got a volunteer there to hold my phone to livestream the first part of the meeting, which the Ohio Revolution page and a few other pages shared.

For the first part of the meeting, we heard from representatives of organizations that are fighting fracking in Wayne National Forest about what they had done and intended to do. That took a long time but gave people a chance to ask questions and get on the same page. Jen, the director of Ohio Sierra Club, told me afterwards she didn't think Columbus Community Bill of Rights should have been allowed to speak, since as it turned out they were not doing much about the Wayne in particular – their campaign is about fracking in Central Ohio. That was my mistake as I had not had time to call the leader of that group and find out what she was going to talk about before the meeting. In a lot of ways, I was winging the entire event.

I had wanted this part of the meeting to go only an hour, but it went 90 minutes. So at 8 p.m. I called a short break, which also gave an opportunity to stop the livestream. Several people who could not attend the meeting had asked for a livestream, but others at the meeting were worried about not being able to talk frankly if their words were being recorded and posted.

We then let people network with each other, which they seemed absolutely eager to do. It was supposed to be a bathroom break, but few people left. Most people were trying to talk to and get to know what others in the room were doing. I let this go for about 20 minutes, but started to get worried about people leaving before we could do the second half of the meeting for people to come together and brainstorm ideas for how to work together to country fracking in the Wayne.

Finally with some help, I called the meeting back to order, and we started to hear from individuals at the meeting. I took copious notes, which are in the meeting minutes attached. Some people were (rightly in my opinion) worried about us from Columbus waltzing into this rural area and telling people there what we think should happen on land in their area. Apparently the fracking has a lot of public support in the Marietta area, not the least because it will generate revenues to go to the schools. That is a tough one to argue against – but these are all the wrong economic incentives. But the fact is, this is public land that belongs to all taxpayers, not just them, and if the water gets poisoned, that hurts all of us, especially their kids and schools.

As the discussion went on, a few themes for action areas began to emerge, such as the need to do outreach to people in the Marietta area, for communications and media relations, and for a secure channel for internal communications among people who wanted to do direct action. Finally as the time approached 9:30 p.m., I had to figure out some way to wrap things up. The fact is people could have gone on for several more hours, and had this gathering had the support it needed, it would have been an all-day or even two-day workshop, not just one evening meeting.

Fortunately just a few days before this meeting, Emma of Sierra Club Central Ohio Group had suggested following up the Conservation Committee meeting with an interest survey for attendees, so I grabbed that idea and suggested the same. That would mean more work for me, but it did give me a way to put some closure on a meeting when people wanted to talk much longer. Ideally we would have had time to drill down to planning actions at a very specific level, but we just didn't get to that point. The interest survey would give me a way to gather that information electronically, then compile it and send it out to everyone as a follow up.

Wayne National Forest Fracking Strategy Session

6:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 17, 2017
Northwood High Building, Room 100
2231 N High St., Columbus, Ohio 43201

Meeting Agenda

6:30 p.m. Welcome – Cathy Cowan Becker, Ohio Revolution and Ohio Sierra Club

The purpose of this meeting is to brainstorm strategies for fighting fracking in Wayne National Forest. As most attendees here know, the Bureau of Land Management auctioned off 17 parcels in the Marietta unit of Wayne National Forest for fracking for \$1.7 million on December 13, 2016. This was despite our efforts to stop it. Some of those efforts included:

- A [change.org petition](#) that garnered over 100,000 signatures.
- Social media awareness campaigns that reached [4.2 million](#), [40,000](#), [29,000](#), and [15,000](#) people on Facebook and about as many again on Twitter.
- Multicity rallies in front of both [Senator Portman's](#) and [Senator Brown's](#) offices.
- Legal responses filed with both the [Bureau of Land Management](#) and [U.S. Forest Service](#) in response to the Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact calling for a full Environmental Impact Statement.

6:40 p.m. Hear from environmental groups

Representatives from different groups tell us more details about what they have been doing to counter fracking in Wayne National Forest, and what they would like to do moving ahead.

Invitations have gone out to representatives from the organizations listed below, though we are not sure if all of them will be here.

- Ohio Environmental Council
- Sierra Club Ohio Chapter
- Athens County Frack Action Network
- Columbus Community Bill of Rights
- United Citizens Action Network

For the sake of meeting time, please try to limit your comments to not more than 10 minutes.

7:30 p.m. Brainstorming session

- What kind of activism should we do in the future to stop more auctions of land for fracking in Wayne National Forest, especially in light of a Trump presidency?
- How can different groups work together to multiply each other's efforts, even if we are doing different things to resist fracking in Wayne National Forest?

8 p.m. Close discussion

- List upcoming actions from organizations and activists
- Sum up any major conclusions
- Adjourn meeting

More than 700 acres of Wayne National Forest leased for fracking

By Marion Renault, mrenault@dispatch.com

The Columbus Dispatch • Thursday December 15, 2016 8:02 AM

Federal officials auctioned more than 700 acres of the Wayne National Forest on Tuesday for eventual fracking, over the protests of environmental groups.

The Bureau of Land Management netted about \$1.7 million in bids for oil and gas leasing rights across 19 parcels of federal land, all but two of which are in the Wayne's Marietta Unit in southeast Ohio.

Offers made by 22 registered bidders ranged from the federally mandated minimum of \$2 per acre to a high bid of \$5,806.12 per acre, according to the federal agency.

The Bureau of Land Management had planned to auction 33 parcels, but took 16 parcels off the table over questions of ownership. Some of those parcels could be reintroduced in future lease sales.

The oil and gas leases would introduce the Wayne to fracking, a process in which as many as 5 million gallons of water, sand and chemicals are injected into wells to fracture deep shale and free trapped gas and oil.

There already are more than 1,200 conventional oil and gas wells across the 240,000-acre forest.

Critics urged the agency to consider public health and pollution effects of fracking. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency this week released the final version of a comprehensive six-year, \$29 million study that concluded that fracking has contaminated drinking water in some circumstances.

Still, environmental groups could not halt the online auction. "It's terribly disappointing," said Wendy Park, a senior attorney for the Center of Biological Diversity's Public Lands Program.

The Bureau of Land Management received 100 "valid" complaints during a mandatory 30-day comment period. On Monday, it denied all of those protests and released explanatory responses to concerns raised in those letters about environmental justice, public health impacts and effects on air and water quality.

Nathan Johnson, an attorney for the Ohio Environmental Council who helped file a protest with other advocacy groups, said the agency didn't properly address new information about the size of well pads and pipelines that would accompany large-scale fracking projects in the Wayne.

"Once they've made the decision to lease, that's the ballgame for them," he said.

There is a 30-day appeal period.

The Bureau of Land Management has 60 days to issue the leases. Companies then would have to submit applications for a permit to drill. That process takes at least six months, said an agency spokesperson.

Meme that reached 4.5 million people on Facebook, 100,000 on Twitter



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Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Representatives from Ohio Sierra Club, Athens County Frack Action Network, United Citizens Action Network, Columbus Community Bill of Rights, Appalachia Resist, Anonymous Columbus Ohio, and Ohio Revolution, with an sign-in list of 67.

See [Livestream Part I](#)

See [Livestream Part II](#)

See [Photos](#)

Meeting called to order at 6:40 p.m. by Cathy Cowan Becker.

Cathy explained that the purpose of the meeting was to bring together interested parties working on fracking in Wayne National Forest to hear what each is doing and to plan an overall strategy. This group met once before on October 27, 2016, after the Bureau of Land Management announced the auction of 33 parcels of the Wayne for fracking on December 13. Despite several petitions, demonstrations outside the offices of senators Portman and Brown, and campaigns to call and write to Kathleen Atkinson, the head forester for the Eastern United States, the BLM went through with the December sale. We met again to regroup and discuss strategy now that this sale has taken place. The meeting had two parts: First, to hear from the groups working against fracking in the Wayne, then to brainstorm ideas for how to move forward.

Ohio Sierra Club – Jen Miller, Ohio state director, and David Ackerman, co-chair of Forests Committee

Jen explained the process for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has to go through to auction off parcels of WNF for fracking. WNF is federal land, so BLM first had to do an Environmental Assessment, which is a quick review of environmental impacts. BLM did this and issued a draft Finding of No Significant Impact or FONSI. Several environmental groups (Sierra Club, Ohio Environmental Council, Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth) issued a [78-page comment](#) on why fracking in the Wayne does have environmental impact, citing things like endangered species, watershed pollution, and climate change, and asked for a full Environmental Impact Statement, which is comprehensive environmental review. BLM ignored these comments and moved forward with a [final EA](#) and [FONSI](#), and did not order the full EIS. In response, the environmental groups [wrote a letter](#) to the U.S. Forest Service asking them to withdraw consent for oil and gas leasing in WNF. Because the fracking would happen on land the Forest Service oversees, they have to power to withdraw consent. However, the Forest Service did not withdraw consent, and 17 parcels were sold on December 13.

Jens said one of the Sierra Club's biggest concerns in this area is legacy wells and mines. A lot of coal mining and gas well drilling has taken place in southeast Ohio, including in the Wayne, and no one knows for sure where all these old mines and wells are. If a new fracking rig drills into an old coal mine or gas well, it can cause groundwater contamination, acid drainage, air pollution, and more.

Jen said the comments made by the environmental groups during the environmental assessment have been used successfully to halt mining and drilling on public lands in other states. She said the Sierra Club is working on a lawsuit under the National Environment Policy Act or NEPA.

These are complicated lawsuits, but Sierra Club has won more of them than any other environmental group. However, most of these victories have been out west where there are different circumstances and different judges than in Ohio.

Jen said there are two critical pieces for a successful NEPA lawsuit.

1. We must show we have exhausted all legal avenues to make our concerns known, and that we have brought scientific data in filing all comments, which she said the environmental groups have done.
2. We must show that we have standing. To do this, Sierra Club and other environmental groups involved in the lawsuit must be representing members who have standing, and for members to have standing, they must be directly affected by fracking in WNF.

More discussion about standing ensued. Jen clarified that to have standing, the person must show a track record of using the Wayne for hiking, fishing, camping or even hunting, and show those activities are negatively impacted by fracking. Right now the standing must involve the Marietta unit of WNF since that is where the fracking is – not the Athens or Ironton unit, though if leases for fracking are expanded to those areas, standing could apply there too.

Jen urged anyone who thinks they might have standing to join the Sierra Club or one of the other environmental organizations involved in the lawsuit and to speak with her after the meeting so she could put them in touch with legal counsel. The timeline is uncertain right now, though the environment groups have now filed a notice of an [intent to sue](#).

Jen also said we should continue the phone calls to regional forester Kathleen Atkinson of USFS, asking her to withdraw consent for the BLM to sell parcels of the Wayne for fracking. This strategy has worked for national forests in Utah and in the southwest.

Athens County Fracking Action Network - Roxanne Groff and Heather Cantino

Roxanne started by pointing people to [ACFAN's website](#), which has a wealth of information about its activities that have helped to keep fracking out of WNF for the past five years. She also acknowledged Nathaniel McCarthy and Kyle Laymon(?) who created the [change.org petition](#) against fracking in WNF that got over 100,000 signatures in just a few weeks. They along with members of ACFAN [presented the petition](#) to the BLM in Washington, DC, on November 14.

Roxanne also talked about the demonstrations in front of the offices of Senators Portman and Brown. She said a representative at Sen. Brown's office met with them standing in the hallway.

Roxanne said another auction for fracking leases on 28 parcels in the Wayne is [scheduled for March 23](#). All the parcels are in the Marietta unit again, in Monroe County, mostly Jackson Township, many near the Ohio River. The auction will again be [online](#). The announcement of the auction was made on January 13, with a 30-day period for protesting the sale. [Details of how to protest the sale are on page 9-10 of [this document](#)]. Monroe County is one of the least populated areas of the state, with high poverty and a lot of support for fracking.

Roxanne encouraged attendees to continue contacting Senators Portman and Brown. Brown is up for re-election again in 2018 and could be pushed on this issue, especially by bringing up climate change. People can also pull [research](#) from the ACFAN page to send to him.

ACFAN is also allies with [Appalachia Resist](#), which is planning camping trips to the Wayne and an action camp training. For information about this, email calvinmf1@yahoo.com.

Columbus Community Bill of Rights – Greg Pace, Carolyn Harding

Greg Pace said community bill of rights motto is that we don't have a fracking problem, we have a democracy problem. We won't get anything out of the state regulatory process unless people come out and take it back. Greg discussed how they are trying to get a bill of rights on the Columbus ballot and said we could consider a similar measure for Marietta.

Carolyn said they will be [touring](#) a fracking injection well in Morrow County on February 4 and holding a [workshop](#) on environmental, social, and economic justice on March 4. She also said they had submitted a resolution for a community bill of rights to the mayor of Marietta, but were told that because this is national land the community can't do anything.

United Citizens Action Network – Jacob Clark

Jacob explained the origins and outlook of the group. He is a veteran and thinks we need action based on the model of Standing Rock. A lot of current social and environmental problems require coalitions and teaching, which his group hopes to facilitate.

UCAN has been working with several students from Kenyon College to organize a camping conference in the Wayne on April 21-23. They have identified a 23 acre area to hold the event, which will include workshops, hiking, interactions, and brainstorming to create a platform.

UCAN likes the Standing Rock model because it brought together people from different walks of life working together in peace and prayer. Some discussion followed in which people expressed concern about not appropriating indigenous movements for non-native people, noting that Standing Rock is a unique situation and we don't have native leadership. Jacob said he was looking at it from a strategic perspective with a hierarchy from leaders to the frontline warriors, so that even though there were 10,000 people at Standing Rock, the flow of energy worked.

BREAK

At this point the meeting broke for about 15 minutes of networking before participants came back for a brainstorming session. This part of the meeting was not livestreamed.

Nathaniel and Kyle, who posted the change.org petition that got over 100,000 signatures Nathaniel is moving to Denver to work for Environment Colorado but will take the cause of protecting Wayne National Forest from fracking with him. National forests all over the country are under attack. He wants to do forest protection as a career.

Aaron, Anonymous Columbus Ohio

Aaron said Anonymous groups have developed ways to communicate using [Discord](#), a chat application for gamers. This allows people to communicate in an encrypted setting. He suggested that Anonymous could set up such a chat for the Wayne National Forest project, and one person from each group join as part of the leadership chat. Anonymous can also help with online actions such as generating a response to a Facebook page. He called this a sleeping giant.

Josh McCarter, veteran with UCAN

Josh brought up the culture divide between the mostly liberal like-minded people in the room and the more conservative people who live in the Marietta area. He said he knows African Americans in the area who think the EPA is crap, climate change is a hoax, and Al Gore made a lot of money. He also said oil and climate denial groups spend a lot of money to spread misinformation. Josh is concerned that people in the Marietta area will not be happy with a bunch of tree-hugging hippie snowflakes coming into the area and telling them not to use the resources there. He said they are good people who want the same things we want – good jobs, clean air and water – but that if we want to get our message across, we will need to communicate with them in the right way. They will see fracking in the Wayne as a problem if it affects them, for example if deer they want to hunt die or their favorite fishing hole is contaminated.

Geoffrey Sea, Southern Ohio Neighbors Group

Geoffrey is concerned with fighting plans for the Piketon Gaseous Diffusion Plant, which is near the western border of the Ironton unit of Wayne National Forest. [Note: The Ironton unit has the least natural gas resources and is least likely to be fracked according to ACFAN.] He said that 10 years ago President Bush wanted to turn the old gaseous diffusion plant into a nuclear waste site, but that people in the area organized to defeat it. Now he says the Obama administration posted a plan to auction off the site for private sale. The area group asked that it be added to Wayne National Forest as a wildlife area, but their proposal was turned down. The site is over 100 acres and contaminated with radiation. Geoffrey said the current plan is to demolish the buildings there, then build a nuclear disposal cell and auction the land around it, which is being marketed to fracking companies to be developed as their center of operations. Federal subsidies would be available. Geoffrey would like to mobilize public comments for this. Email him at geoffreysea@gmail.com if you are interested in following up.

Discussion then ensued regarding communications, both internally between all the different groups working on the Wayne, and externally with possible partners such as labor unions, people who live near the Marietta unit, and the news media. There were suggestions to start a communications committee of people who could write letters to the editor and work with outlets such as Columbus Free Press, as well as create a social media presence.

Elizabeth Bolen and Joy Adams discussed outreach to people in the Marietta area, which is where they are from. Joy presented a bill of rights resolution to the Marietta mayor, but it was not well received. Elizabeth created a petition that 200 people in the Marietta area signed. She suggested holding an outreach meeting there and contacting those people to attend. Heather of ACFAN said she also has 100 names of people in the area who could be invited. She said these are people who are not on social media but who read the paper, so we will also need to reach out to media and businesses in the Marietta area. She said some people have shifted their entire political outlook about fracking in the Wayne based on what they have heard and read.

We ended the meeting with the resolution that Cathy would create a google questionnaire to find out which projects people are interested in and set up a mode of communication for future planning and endeavors. Work areas included 1) internal communications, especially through the online platform discussed by Anonymous, 2) external communications to media and social media through a communications committee, and 3) outreach to people in the Marietta area.

That google questionnaire will be sent along with these minutes to everyone who put their email information on the sign-in sheets.

ACTION STEPS

Protest the auction

We have until February 13 to protest the March 23 auction of [28 parcels](#) in Monroe County in Wayne National Forest. Protests can be mailed to 20 M Street SE, Suite 950, Washington, D.C. 20003, or faxed to 202-912-7798. Follow these instructions:

May I protest the BLM's decision to offer the lands in this Notice for lease?

Yes, under regulation 43 CFR 3120.1-3, you may protest the inclusion of a parcel listed in this sale notice. All protests must meet the following requirements:

- Protests must be postmarked or faxed by February 13, 2017, which allows for 30 calendar days to file a protest. The BLM will dismiss a late-filed protest or an improperly filed protest.
- A protest must state the interest of the protesting party in the matter (also known as a "statement of reasons" to support the protest).
- The protest must specify the parcel being protested (by parcel number).
- You may file a protest either by mail in hardcopy form or by telefax. You may not file a protest by electronic mail. The BLM will also not accept protests submitted in person or by any means other than US mail or facsimile.
- Protests submitted by mail shall be addressed to the State Director to the address listed in the letterhead of this notice.
- Protests submitted by telefax must be sent to **(202) 912-7798**. Protests sent to a different fax number or submitted by electronic mail will be dismissed.
- If the party signing the protest is doing so on behalf of an association, partnership, or corporation, the signing party must reveal the relationship between them. For example, unless an environmental group authorizes an individual member of its group to act on their behalf, the individual cannot make a protest in the group's name.
- A protest must include the name and address of the protesting party and reference the specific serial number or parcel number that is being protested.

*Sierra Club will issue an action alert on this

Ask US Forest Service to withdraw consent

Keep contacting Kathleen Atkinson, USFS Regional Forester
414-297-3765, katkinson@fs.fed.us

If you might have standing in a NEPA lawsuit

Contact Jen Miller, Ohio Sierra Club
Phone: 614-461-0734 x300
Email: jen.miller@sierraclub.org

Call Sen. Sherrod Brown

Ask Sen. Brown to live up to his professed concern about climate change and to pressure the USFS to withdraw consent for the auction. Send him [research](#) from the ACFAN page. Or ask to arrange a meeting with Brown's office.
202-224-2315

SOCIAL MEDIA - FACEBOOK

Groups

Stop The Lease Of Wayne National Forest For Gas And Oil Drilling - public group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/299299213789168/?ref=br_rs

Wayne Forest Action - closed group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/198240477252433/>

#SaveTheWayne - closed group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/208117759623280/>

NO fracking in ohio Wayne national forest - closed group
https://www.facebook.com/groups/887376314695708/?ref=br_rs

Pages

Save the Wayne
<https://www.facebook.com/savethewayne/>

Keep Wayne Wild - Stop Fracking Ohio
<https://www.facebook.com/KeepWayneWild/?fref=nf>

WEBSITES

Athens County Fracking Action Network
<http://www.acfan.org/>

Anonymous Columbus Ohio
<https://www.facebook.com/columbusanons/>

Appalachia Resist
<https://appalachiaresist.wordpress.com/>

Columbus Community Bill of Rights
<http://www.columbusbillofrights.org/>

Ohio Environmental Council
<http://www.theoec.org/>

Ohio Sierra Club
<http://www.sierraclub.org/ohio>

Ohio Revolution
<http://www.ohiorevolution.us/>