

## ► Allegany State Park

# Park commission discusses oil drilling

By Rick Miller  
Olean Times Herald

**RED HOUSE** — Two members of the Adirondack Mountain Club asked the Allegany State Park Regional Commission for an update Tuesday on the status of oil and gas exploration in the 65,000-acre state park.

An Amherst-based company, U.S. Energy Development Corp., earlier this summer notified the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation it planned to drill five oil and gas wells on nearly 3,000 acres of park lands where it says it controls the mineral rights.

Over the border in Pennsylvania, the company and others are drilling oil and gas wells in parts of the Allegheny National Forest every 500 feet and connecting them with miles of roads as it cuts through the forest.

Mr. Wopperer said he led a hike up Black Snake Mountain Trail in the Quaker area of the park, west of Science Lake, over the weekend to the area across the state line, where roads between drilling sites criss-cross.

"I've seen the future and it's not pretty," he said. "You can smell oil everywhere. I can see bad things coming (to Allegany State Park). This is high stakes for future generations."

Dalton Burgett, commission chairman, said parks officials in Albany and the New York State Attorney General's Office are trying to determine whether the company has the right.

"Nobody wants drilling in the park. They are acutely aware of it, right up to (Parks Commissioner) Carol Ash's office and the attorney general," Mr. Burgett said.

Mineral rights usually give the holder "right of reasonable access," he said, but, "usually, you try to agree (on access)."

Commissioner Laurie Peterson insisted, "Nobody is taking this lightly."



Rick Miller/Olean Times Herald

**Hugh Dunne (left), a member of the Allegany State Park Regional Commission, gestures Tuesday while proposing the state buy mineral rights in the 65,000-acre state park rather than allow oil and gas drilling in the park. Others at the table from left are Lisa Fineberg, Dalton Burgett, chairman; Wendy Brand and Laurie Peterson. At rear is Jay Wopperer of the Adirondack Mountain Club.**

Another commissioner, Hugh Dunne of Great Valley, who is a former park manager, said mineral rights in the park are privately held on as much as two-thirds of the park, or more than 40,000 acres. Land was added to the state park without buying the mineral rights. It has been complicated over the years with the lease to National Fuel Gas of 10,000 acres for natural-gas storage and the 11-mile gas pipeline that cuts through the park.

Mr. Dunne said it was estimated the cost to buy the mineral rights in the park could cost as much as \$400 million.

"Let's at least get together and start talking" about buying some of the mineral rights in the park that the state does not already own, Mr. Dunne said. "Let's research this and see who has the mineral rights. Let's start talking and get some dialogue going."

Mr. Wopperer suggested the state park complete its master plan prior to

initiating the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) process. He said that fracking, the process well developers use to ready new wells for producing oil and gas, "is a dirty process" where water, brine and chemicals are spilled onto the ground.

Mr. Wopperer said he was impressed with the commissioners' strong feelings over the proposed oil and gas development in the park. He urged them to look into setting up a program where individuals who do own mineral rights in the park could donate them to the park.

There is also a proposal by Buffalo Assemblyman Sam Hoyt to have a sunset clause for mineral rights in the park - many of which have become clouded over time.

"It will be tough because of the way the park was bought piece by piece," Mr. Dunne said. The development companies are investors, he said. "They aren't looking out for you and me."