

Denton VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Denton, Texas
Established 1961

P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station
Denton, Texas 76204

March 2008

Sue Smith, President
Sondra Ferstl, VOTER Editor

CALENDAR

Thursday, March 13, 7 p.m. General Meeting. Water Issues in North Texas.

Speaker: Glenn Clingenpeel.

Friday, April 4 – Sunday, April 6. LWV-Texas State Convention. Hilton Fort Worth.

If interested, call Sue Smith at 387-1016.

Sunday, April 13. 3 p.m. Board Meeting.

Home of Peg La Point, 1900 Highland Park Circle. Members are welcome to attend Board Meetings.

Saturday, April 19. Annual Meeting. The

Workbook for Annual Meeting will arrive by March 19 with all the details.

Look for the LWV-Denton Voters Guide to contested races in the City Council and School Board elections of May 10.

Membership in the League of Women Voters of Denton for the remainder of the League year (i.e., until August 31, 2008) is \$25 for an individual membership. Please send a check payable to LWV-Denton to the Treasurer, Ann MacMillan at LWV-Denton, P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station, Denton, TX 76204.

WATER ISSUES IN NORTH TEXAS

Our speaker at the March 13 meeting will be Glenn Clingenpeel, Executive Assistant to the General Manager of the Trinity River Authority of Texas. Mr. Clingenpeel will give us an overview of water development and planning in North Central Texas. He will also provide a brief review of the history of the Trinity River and will discuss issues affecting water supply and water quality in the basin.

Mr. Clingenpeel received a BA and BS in biology from the University of Texas at Austin in 1995, an MS in Environmental Sciences from University of North Texas in 1998 and an MBA from University of Texas at Arlington in 2006. He went to work at the Trinity River Authority in 1998 as the Clean Rivers Program Coordinator before being promoted to the position of Manager of Special Studies and Assessments. In both of those positions he worked on issues of water quantity and quality issues including nutrients and reuse. He was promoted to his current position of Executive Assistant to the General Manager in 2005.

Water is one of the central issues affecting life in our region and members are urged to attend this important meeting.

Peg La Point, Program VP

GAS WELL DRILLING IN NORTH TEXAS

Julie Smith gave us an excellent overview of gas well drilling at our February meeting. She explained that, as of early 2007, there were over 100 companies with 12,000 wells in the 17-county area of North Texas. Over 2,000 of those were in Denton County.

We discussed the fact that the Texas Railroad Commission is responsible for governing gas and oil production in Texas. This makes the election of environmentally friendly commissioners extremely important.

Ms. Smith informed us that the Barnett Shale produces about 1.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day, enough to power about 10,500 homes a year. Forecasts say it will eventually reach 1.7 billion cubic feet, or 2 percent of annual domestic production. Because of this massive development, there are several areas of North Texas riddled with a dense web of roads and rigs. There is growing awareness that gas well development often prevents other kinds of land use because it is not possible to build above or near pipes carrying gas.

Concerns about drilling arise because of noise, lights, erosion and sedimentation, pollution of air, soil and water, the problems associated with reserve pits, and deterioration of roads carrying heavy truck traffic. Often, landowners have little or no control over the location of drilling rigs or the supply lines carrying gas off their property. Local governments are not always informed of the location of delivery lines, and lines are not always buried as deeply as they should be.

During the drilling process (and when wells are expanded), water is forced under enormous pressure into the rock to free the gas. This water returns to the surface and is stored in ponds beside the drilling rig. Because the water often contains contaminants and salts, the pits need to be lined with plastic to keep the waste from soaking into the ground. Ponds also need to be covered with nets to prevent birds from landing and being trapped or poisoned. The pits must be built carefully to prevent a breach during heavy rains. If the well is drilled in a flood plain, there is risk of contamination of nearby streams or wetlands.

Some municipalities require drillers to use a closed loop system in which the drilling water and drilling muds are circulated through pipes and used again instead of being poured into pits. The obvious advantages are in the reuse of the fluids and the elimination of reserve pits. Denton does not require such a system.

Drilling wastes are usually trucked to specific sites where geologic formations or old wells will accept the fluids. The wastes are injected into the ground at these sites. Great care must be taken to avoid contamination of local water tables. These injection sites are often opposed by neighbors because of heavy truck traffic, light pollution, noise, and the potential of water well contamination.

Drilling operations consume enormous amounts of water. Near urban areas, drillers may purchase water from a city, meaning that purified drinking water is being used as drilling fluid. Drillers usually use groundwater, which does not need to be of high quality.

The Fort Worth Star Telegram reported that a corporation has acquired rights to nearly 9 billion gallons of water per year from the Brazos River, planning to sell it to drilling companies for use in Barnett Shale production. According to the article, that is only enough water to supply the oil and gas drilling companies in Granbury for one year.

Ms. Smith explained that although “flare-offs” of gas may seem wasteful and are sometimes alarming, they serve as safety valves and prevent too much pressure and potential explosions. She also reminded us that explosions at gas wells are extremely rare and not of primary concern.

Because of new technologies like horizontal drilling and application of extreme pressure to underground formations, gas wells can have a long life. When they must finally be shut down, they need to be properly capped off and all equipment removed from the site. Most problems occur in the capping of wells when they have been sold to small-scale owners without the resources or inclination to properly clean up the facility.

Environmental compliance is governed by over a dozen federal laws governing clean air, clean water, migratory birds, endangered species, OSHA, oil pollution and toxic substances. State regulations are under the auspices of the Railroad Commission, the Texas water Code and the Texas Natural Resources Code.

Local municipalities can control drilling through the use of zoning. There can be some local control of noise, gas flaring, setbacks, drilling schedules, lighting, containment systems, and road repair agreements. Local monitoring often falls to the Fire Marshall. Denton formerly had a

dedicated gas well inspector, but that position has not been filled for about seven months.

Peg La Point, Program VP

PRESIDENT’S PODIUM

Elections, elections. By the time you receive this we will have participated in primary elections and making plans for the May elections for City Council and Denton ISD Board of Trustees. We are best known for our Voters Guides for each election, so it is very important to distribute these to as many people as possible. Thanks to Ken and Sondra Ferstl for delivering the Guides to libraries throughout Denton County. All others were delivered following our February general meeting. Unfortunately I had to miss the meeting so I don’t know everyone who volunteered that evening.

All our general meetings have been very interesting and the one on March 13th, our last one of the year, will be no exception. Then on to Annual Meeting April 19th, which you will all want to attend.

Sue Smith

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