

Triple Divide: Everything's downstream

The Triple Divide is that fabled spot in the Pennsylvania hills just south of the New York border where the headwaters of three rivers reside nearly side-by-side.

The Genesee, the Allegheny and the west branch of the Susquehanna — which ultimately flow north into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, southwest to the Gulf of Mexico and southeast to Chesapeake Bay, respectively — all rise in the same field near Gold, Pa.

The area is one of four in North American where two continental divides meet.

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As we reported in late 2011, the Triple Divide is in that part of Pennsylvania that overlies shale rich in natural gas, and some activists worry that drillers could spoil the pristine conditions where the three rivers are born.

A documentary about the divide and

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Click on this column at DemocratandChronicle.com/520 for links to the film trailer, the WGRZ-TV report and other related material.

the impact of gas drilling on water quality, which we mentioned in our 2011 report, is now completed. *Triple Divide* is scheduled to premier later this month and I, for one, am anxious to see it. You can learn more about the film and see snippets of it at *Triple*

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Divide's website, triple-dividefilm.org. The most complete trailer is a loving, lyrical introduction to the divide itself.

The most telling line in the trailer is "For the Triple Divide, everything is downstream." Those words echoed when I read an email the other day from one of the filmmakers, Melissa Troutman, who reported that a plant to treat wastewater from hydraulic fracturing is planned for a field on "the next hill over" from the divide. I measure the two spots about three miles distant.

The plant is to be built by a company called RevH2O, about which I could learn next to nothing. The one short blog post I could find about the facility described it as a no-discharge plant, meaning, I think, that it would be designed to treat fracking wastewater to remove solids and some contaminants, then make the fluid available for use in another fracking operation.

If it works right, no wastewater is discharged to the environment and everything is copacetic. If it were to,

say, leak ... well, as the voice-over says, New York's downstream.

Many such facilities have been springing up in Pennsylvania to replace municipal sewage plants, most of which no longer accept fracking wastewater. Pennsylvania also is host to a number of new deep injection wells, which are used for the salty fluid that is extracted from a well as gas is produced.

Two such injection wells are going in about 90 miles west of Gold near Corry, Pa., in a spot that's literally a stone's throw from the New York border. They're being developed in part by John Holko, owner of Genesee County-based Lenape Resources, who told me not long ago the facility will be safe and unobtrusive. Neighbors in New York and Pennsylvania don't agree, as reported by Dave McKinley of WGRZ-TV in Buffalo.

New York's downstream from Corry, too, in more ways that one.

The watchdog column appears in print on Fridays and online all the time at DemocratandChronicle.com. This column first appeared in the online 520 environmental blog. Steve Orr can be reached at (585) 258-2386.