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Drilling Operations to Continue in Pennsylvania's Tioga County

By David M. DeSalle and Lou Crocco

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Duane Morris LLP

A Texas-based drilling company restarted operations in Tioga County, Pa., after reaching a tentative settlement agreement with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC). The SRBC is likely to agree to the settlement at its March 18 meeting, according to a spokesperson for the commission.

On January 12, 2010, the SRBC ordered Texas-based Novus Operating, LLC (Novus) to stop all water-related activities at two drilling pad sites in the Marcellus Shale formation in Brookfield Township. The Marcellus Shale is a sedimentary rock formation that contains largely untapped natural gas reserves. Novus began drilling two wells without prior approval from the SRBC. The company's action was discovered during an SRBC investigation. According to the SRBC, no water use was involved in this violation. Novus had begun drilling and essentially had set conductor pipes.

"They had finished all the right paperwork in the application, but simply started operations before final approval," said Susan Obleski, director of communications for the SRBC.

Novus could not be reached for comment.

Natural gas drillers must have SRBC approval before any drilling activity occurs or any water-related facilities are constructed. The SRBC order also prohibits Novus from continuing to drill or withdrawing water for use at those two drilling pad sites, or any other location that may not yet be disclosed.

The Harrisburg-based SRBC is the governing agency established under a 100-year compact signed on December 24, 1970, by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.

David M. DeSalle is a partner of Duane Morris LLP, practicing in the area of energy law. Mr. DeSalle advises clients on a variety of transactional and regulatory issues and also represents clients before state and federal courts and regulatory agencies.

Lou Crocco is a managing director of Duane Morris Government Affairs LLC. He is a former legislative leadership staffer in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. He works as a lobbyist-consultant at DMGA, representing clients both in Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.