

# **Hardy Eyed For Natural Gas Production In W.Va. Hoped For This Year**

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By Jeremy Hunt

HARRISONBURG - The Houston energy company seeking to drill for natural gas in northwestern Rockingham County has already begun work on a similar project just over the West Virginia state line.

Carrizo (Marcellus) LLC, a subsidiary of Carrizo Oil & Gas Inc., recently finished drilling a well in Hardy County, W.Va., and it hopes to begin production of natural gas using a process called "hydrofracking" this year.

Chip Johnson, president and chief executive of Carrizo Oil & Gas, said well tests looked promising, but the company won't know if the site will be profitable until production begins.

"You can never tell what you've found until you hydrofrack. So far, the geology looked good on that," Johnson said.

Carrizo hopes to extract natural gas from the Marcellus Shale field, a sedimentary formation the size of Greece that underlies much of Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York and West Virginia. A small portion of the shale field underlies northwest Virginia.

In recent years, energy companies have been tapping into the shale field using horizontal drilling and hydrofracking. Hydrofracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a process that uses a high-pressured mixture of water and chemicals to break rock apart and release trapped gas.

The Rockingham County Board of Supervisors tabled a request last month by Carrizo (Marcellus) LLC for a special-use permit to drill an exploratory well near Bergton. The board said it needed more information before voting on the application.

County officials are still gathering information about the proposal, and a decision could be made as early as the board's March 24 meeting.

A half-dozen people - including conservationists and a retired environmental engineer - raised concerns at the board's meeting on Feb. 24 about the project's potential effect on water quality.

One of them was Bruce Ritchie, a Criders resident who has since organized an informational meeting about drilling in the Marcellus Shale field and how it has impacted other communities. The meeting will be held Thursday at 6:30 p.m. at the Bergton Community Center.

Ritchie says drilling in the Marcellus Shale field has been damaging to other communities, and property owners often aren't aware of the implications of leasing their land to energy companies.

"We felt like this is our time to try to get the people in this community to look at actual experience of people in other locations where gas has been drilled for," he said. "We're just trying to get people to look at the real world situation."

If Rockingham County gives Carrizo the green light for the Bergton well and the company can produce enough gas, many more such operations are likely to spring up.

Johnson says his company has lease agreements on 30,000 acres along the Virginia-West Virginia border in the northwest Valley.

Issues surrounding Marcellus wells have cropped up as production has grown exponentially in the last two years as more and more energy companies look to tap into the shale deposit. Potential environmental impacts are often the largest concern, but problems with noise and air quality also have been raised as more wells go online.

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