MARCELLEUS SHALE (Hydraulic Fracturing for Natural Gas Extraction in Pennsylvania)

(The following presentations were made at the Council of Georgist Organizations conference in Harrisburg, PA on August 1, 2001. The presentations are reported here from an audio tape and notes by GroundSwell editor Nadine Stoner.)

[Painted above are Jan Jarrett, Michael Wood, and Alanna Hartzok.]

About the presenters:

Moderator and presenter Alanna Hartzok, Scotland, PA, is the co-director of Earth Rights Institute, http://www.earthrights.net/, and a past president of the Council of Georgist Organizations. She is the General Secretary of the International Union for LVT, Internal Outreach Coordinator, R. Schalkenbach Fdn.; and recipient of the International Earth Day Award.

Jan Jarrett, Harrisburg, PA, has a 25 year career in public interest, environmental and clean energy advocacy in Penn. She currently is an environmental policy and outreach consultant. She works on policies and environmental issues. She worked for 10 years for the Penn. Chesapeake Bay Foundation where she was the Penn. grass roots coordinator. For two years she coordinated a coalition of consumers and environmental organizations in the Penn. Campaign for Clean and Affordable Energy which sought to gain consumer protection and clean energy. She worked for 13 years for Penn. Future where she helped develop a successful campaign by creating policies for renewable energy and energy efficient industries. The Pittsburgh Post Gazette named her one of the 10 most influential people for her work on Marcellus Shale gas.

Michael Wood, Harrisburg, PA, is the Research Director of the Penn. Budget and Policy Center. The Budget and Policy Center is a non-profit, non-partisan progressive research think tank in Harrisburg that works on tax and budget issues primarily at the state level. He has authored several research and policy briefs for the PBPC. Before joining that in 2007 he was the Budget Manager for the city of Harrisburg. He also spent a number of years with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a Revenue Forecasting Analyst at the Dept. of Revenue.

JAN JARRETT: You may know a lot about fracking but what might be useful for you to understand is how the issue really came to Pennsylvania in such a sudden and disruptive way. And how the state and advocates wrestled with the issues that swirl around fracking and all the turbulence and the changes in that context and the options we were faced with in the political sense within a fairly brief period of time. The story of the Marcellus Shale really starts 400 million years ago with an inland sea that was created as continents crashed into each other and then separated from each other. It was a time even before the dinosaurs. In the inland lake where the Marcellus Shale formation is, algae and other simple forms of life forms settled to the bottom of the lake and created this shale gas and enriched the compound trapping it in rock. That is well known that we have this deposit under much of Pennsylvania. It is usually found about 1,000 feet underground, and even though it was known that that deposit was there it was not able to be accessed with the technology over the 20th century. Some innovations in the late 20th century and into the early 21st century changed that. Shale gas and unconventional gas extraction was pioneered in Texas through a series of events. There was a company based in Houston, TX, Range Resources, and they had operations already in Pennsylvania in drilling shallow wells. Gas drilling has been done for about 100 years with vertical drilling. They also had some of the same kinds of problems and issues that hydraulic fracturing in the shale has lots of times. But nevertheless here in Pennsylvania it was well established with infrastructure to transport that.

That was already here to get our gas out and also the pipelines that ran across Pennsylvania getting gas from other areas south from the Gulf and Louisiana and Texas up to the market in the East. A geologist who worked with Range Resources was kind at the end of his career and with financial issues convinced the president of Range Resources to take a chance on using this hydraulic fracturing technique on the Marcellus Shale to see what they might get. These shale deposits typically are extremely productive right away though they level out after a few years. (continued on page 12)