



February 28, 2022

The Honorable Gene Yaw
457 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3023
Via email

Dear Senator Yaw,

Thank you for your letter dated February 2, 2022, in regard to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that will provide significant funding to repair and improve the nation's infrastructure and address critical environmental projects such as the plugging of abandoned oil and gas wells throughout the nation. The Department of Environmental Protection ("DEP" or "The Department") has been working diligently for many months in anticipation of the passage of this Act and is taking the necessary steps to receive this federal funding and apply it toward its intended purposes.

In response to the nine questions that you posed in your correspondence the Department is pleased to provide the following responses:

- 1) **What is DEP's best estimate of the number of abandoned gas wells in Pennsylvania?** DEP has identified nearly 27,000 wells without a responsible owner and/or operator that still require plugging in Pennsylvania. The Department also estimates that due to lack of recordkeeping prior to the mid-1950s there are an additional 200,000 abandoned wells throughout Pennsylvania that haven't been located or identified yet.
- 2) **Does DEP have a list of known abandoned wells?** Yes. DEP identified 26,908 wells as part of its Notice of Intent (NOI) to apply for a formula grant application that DEP has record of. According to DEP records, there are more than 1,000 additional wells located in the Allegheny National Forest that were not included in the NOI application.
- 3) **Have the known abandoned wells been prioritized so that the highest emitters of methane, or other significant environmental issues, are addressed first and how many wells are in this category?** DEP has scored the risk factors of approximately 8,700 known abandoned wells. Highest priority is assigned to wells that pose imminent threats to public safety, then to wells that are actively harming the environment (e.g., discharging brine or oil to the ground or to surface waters). Finally, consideration is given to the proximity of the well to certain features like water supplies or homes and the general hazards posed by features of the well site such as open tanks located on a well site.
- 4) **What is DEP doing to identify or locate more of those abandoned wells which DEP believes exist?** DEP has instructed its inspectors to make such identification and inspection a priority. DEP is also considering contracting for such services through the funds that are made available via the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
- 5) **With regard to wells, which are plugged, what information does the Department maintain (e.g., depth, plugging material, name of contractor)?** The well plugging certificate includes

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the operator and well plugging contractor's information as well as the materials used to plug the well, the location of the various plug set depths, the casing that was pulled from the well, and the ultimate depth at which the well was plugged (either its true vertical depth or an approved alternative attainable bottom). Please see the attached well plugging certificate form.

- 6) **Does DEP publicly bid well plugging projects?** Unless an emergency contract is issued, all plugging jobs are publicly bid.
- 7) **Does DEP have standard bid specifications for well plugging projects?** Yes, please see attached.
- 8) **What is DEP doing to manage the 40-fold increase in funding for the well plugging program?** DEP has been evaluating this issue for some time and has identified a number of steps that can be taken to manage this historic level of well plugging funding. This includes adding additional positions to focus on Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act implementation, evaluating and developing contracts with third parties for a variety of services including well identification, plugging projects of various sizes, contracts to develop plans and permit applications, and overall well plugging program management. It should be noted that up to 10 percent of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act monies can be utilized for administrative purposes. The Department continues to work closely with the Governor's Budget Office to address any unfilled needs.
- 9) **Is DEP considering public-private undertakings as part of the well plugging program?** Yes. The Department has been in discussion with several entities that have shown an interest in this work. In addition, the Department developed a survey and reached out to oil and gas plugging and plugging support contractors to gather information about their capabilities for plugging wells and providing support services in Pennsylvania. To date, the Department has received responses from 128 respondents and this information is being used by the Department to develop strategies for coordinating potential future public-private partnerships or opportunities for such collaboration.

Thank you again for your interest in this matter. The Department is committed to continuing to work with the federal government, the Pennsylvania General Assembly, oil and gas plugging contractors and other businesses and the general public as it responds to and implements the provisions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The Department understands that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides the resources and opportunity to address the plugging of a significant number of legacy wells that exist in Pennsylvania and looks forward to doing its part to seize this opportunity to improve Pennsylvania's environment for future generations.

Respectfully,



Patrick McDonnell
Secretary

Enclosures