



EARTHWORKS

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# SAVING THE SUSQUEHANNA FROM DRILLING

## Why it matters and how to do it

The mighty Susquehanna River stretches 400 miles across three states (Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania), provides drinking water to millions of people, and supports many unique natural environments. But in 2011, American Rivers named it the [nation's most endangered river](#) because of the risks posed by natural gas development.

That's why a broad network of organizations and citizens across Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania have come together to make sure that the [Susquehanna River Basin Commission](#) (SRBC) steps up to protect communities and the environment from the harmful impacts of gas operations, which use a lot of water and create a lot of pollution. Fortunately, there are ways to do this—and it's important for anyone who cares about water supplies to get involved.

**SRBC is a special federal-interstate agency entrusted with managing a shared, public resource**, the waters of the Susquehanna River Basin. Made up of representatives from governments in three states and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the agency is required to issue permits for a range of purposes—including both drinking water supplies and industries like gas drilling. But it's also charged with conserving water quantity and quality for current and future generations.

**SRBC must stop conducting business as usual by issuing water withdrawal permits one-by-one.** SRBC reviews each application for a water withdrawal permit. But even if a single permit seems minor, thousands together can have major effects, especially over time and across the Basin as a whole. This piecemeal approach ignores the connections among different waterways and supports gas development despite damage caused.

**SRBC needs to develop a plan for using and protecting water resources** that is based on long-term planning and sound science. The Commission is preparing to revise its Comprehensive Plan for the Water Resources of the Susquehanna River Basin, due in 2013. It should focus on the challenges to water resources and quality posed by gas development, both now and because of industry plans to expand operations in both the Marcellus and Utica Shale areas.

**No more water withdrawal permits should be allowed until such a plan is adopted.** Until then, the impacts of shale gas development on the entire Basin can't be fully understood or measures put in place to prevent them—risking even more pollution and environmental harm.

**The impacts of shale gas development don't stop at state borders** and are beyond the capacity of any one state to handle. With the Susquehanna providing half of the freshwater that flows into the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, New York, and Pennsylvania all have to meet a federal requirement (known as the Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, rule) to reduce pollution flowing downstream. This includes sediment runoff into waterways, one of the most direct effects of gas development.

**The SRBC Compact requires all member states to jointly take responsibility for water use and management in the Basin.** But when it comes to natural gas development, activities in just one member state, Pennsylvania, are driving SRBC's decisions. Maryland and New York don't yet allow high-volume hydraulic fracturing and are still studying the impacts of gas development and considering new regulations. SRBC should base decisions about permits and policies on what all member states want—and citizens across the entire Basin have a right to demand better protections.