

LWV Ohio Statehouse Day – April 9, 2014

LWVO Lobbyist Report

Land Use Report – Kristin Vessey

As of last November (2013), we were watching 7 land-use-related bills in the House, 5 in the Senate. Some were introduced at the beginning of the 130th GA session (2013), most more recently, and few have gone beyond their 1st or 2nd hearing. As this 130th (2013-2014) moves along, we see 20 bills related to O&G (= oil and gas), most in the House, but only HB375, Severance Tax – O&G Wells, has progressed; a substitute bill would raise the tax rate on well owners and send more of the money to the local governments where the shale drilling is occurring; after a 1st hearing in Dec 2013, its 7th hearing in the House Ways & Means committee is scheduled - rapid movement is possible!

By my reckoning, two bills about **agriculture** (SB150 tries feebly to deal with runoff: an amended (substitute) bill on its 4th hearing was passed by the Senate & is now in the House where its 2nd hearing was scheduled for 2/18/14. It calls for more but inadequate regulation; considers livestock manure “animal excreta” rather than fertilizer-i.e., manures do not equal fertilizer though they bear phosphorus & nitrogen, the chief nutrients enriching Lake Erie; forbids the disclosure of info & makes nutrient management plans voluntary. The ODA director Daniels, in proponent testimony, claimed that manure “will be important going forward”), two bills about **land use** (SB116-Abandoned Land, about trespass, & SB172-Land Reutilization, about property tax foreclosure – only this one was reported out as amended), and five bills on **water** (SB37-Water Access to Every Residence-a substitute bill was accepted, SB179-Recycled Water Regulation-reported out as amended, SB215-Lake Erie Shoreline Improvement, HB327-Co-Water-Sewer Assessments, HB417-Water-Wastewater Utility Service Improvement Projects) have also appeared, but except where noted, all seem stuck in committee at or before a 1st hearing.

General comments on water:

Interestingly, there are no bills relating to the Ohio River, which bounds 1.5 sides of Ohio. It is indeed an industrialized river, but it also provides the drinking water for some large cities (think of Wheeling, Parkersburg, & Huntington, WV; Portsmouth & Cincinnati, OH; and all the smaller towns on both sides of the river, in KY as well). Concentrating on only Lake Erie on our northern border does not serve them well, and on each side of the state we are contributing to those waters both our agricultural and industrial runoff. As you realize, the Ohio joins the Mississippi River, which then carries our burden, affecting life as the water goes into the Gulf of Mexico, where dead zones of insufficient oxygen mean life there is thwarted. So we need to be aware that we are damaging both big bodies of ‘fresh water’, and look for ways to reduce our impact, by our behavior and our lobbying.

When environmental disasters such as the chemical spills on WV's Elk River flowed into the Kanawha R. & then into the Ohio R. by Huntington, or the coal ash horrors or CAFO leaks contaminate it, we are reminded that we all need clean water and that we share Earth's resources. Ohio is one of 8 states that belong to ORSANCO (= Ohio River Basin Sanitary Commission), yet are we speaking out about the possible barge transport of fracking waste to our injection wells? Or about the excessive amounts of phosphorus and nitrogen we are allowing to wash from our fields?

Land Use is an umbrella category: fracking, water, agriculture, & even energy all fit comfortably into it. We stay busy watching the activities of our representatives and hope for more meaningful legislation.