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# Legislators optimistic about getting special session on gas drilling

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Local legislators gave an update on Marcellus shale drilling regulations and one woman discussed living near a drilling site during a meeting of watershed and environmental groups Wednesday.

Two bills to regulate the natural gas drilling were merged in the recently concluded session of the West Virginia Legislature, but died on the session's final day.

"We weren't successful and that was extremely disappointing," said Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia.

But, Fleischauer said it is the goal of some legislators to have a special session to discuss the industry. She said they hope they can have one after the special primary election for governor.

Fleischauer and two other delegates provided the update to the WV/PA Monongahela Area Watersheds Compact at its monthly meeting.

Marcellus shale natural

gas drilling involves horizontal drilling thousands of feet below the surface. The rock formation is then fractured to release the gas. The process utilizes a large quantity of water in order to obtain the gas.

Roughly two dozen legislators, including Fleischauer, signed a letter sent to acting Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin asking him to order the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to stop issuing permits for the drilling until the special session.

Delegate Mike Manypenny,

D-Taylor, also signed the letter. He said the governor's office said it could take up to four weeks until they receive the letter.

Working on the bill was one of Manypenny's best and most frustrating times as a delegate, he said. The frustrating part was watching the bill being whittled down, but many strong amendments added remained in the bill.

Delegate Tim Manchin, D-Marion, said he didn't sign the letter so not to alienate

the industry as he tries to bring them to the table to discuss regulations.

He said the state still needs minimum regulations, such as monitoring of withdrawal from local streams and information on how water used in the process is disposed.

While there are guidelines from the DEP, Manchin said "There's no legal teeth behind any of it."

In addition to the update from the delegates, attendees discussed the CONSOL settlements with various gov-

ernment agencies for violations of the Clean Water Act. They also heard from Stacey Haney about what it is like to live near a drilling site.

Haney doesn't have drilling on her property, but nearby properties do. She said her family has experienced health problems and drinking-water issues. Once the water was replaced, the family's health got better, she said.

She said the drilling company said everything they do is completely safe, but she isn't convinced.