UT Puts Fracking Research Plan on Hold

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The University of Tennessee has momentarily shelved its plan to conduct fracking research at the Cumberland River Research Forest after no oil and gas companies bid on the project.

The director of the Forest Resources AgResearch and Education Center, Kevin Hoyt, told the Knoxville News Sentinel [1] the lack of bids proved disappointing, the school will continue to look into continuing the research in the future.

University officials say the feasibility of the research will be re-examined. The proposals called for leasing the roughly 8,600 acres of UT property in Scott and Morgan counties to a drilling company. The only response came from CNX Gas Company, which gave a "no-bid" response letter saying the research was not economically viable for the company under the restrictions outlined by the university.

UT has examined drilling for oil and gas on the land for nearly a decade. The State Building Commission approved the most recent request for proposals in March, and four companies interested in bidding met for a pre-bid proposal conference at the headquarters for the Cumberland Forest in June.

Fracking, a controversial method of extracting oil and gas from shale beneath the earth, involves drilling vertically into the ground and then horizontally, pumping a cocktail of water and chemicals into the ground to fracture the shale and release the oil and gas.

Environmental groups across the state have sent letters to the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees and the building commission protesting the plan, citing concerns about potential conflicts of interest, lack of transparency and environmental impacts.

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Information from: Knoxville News Sentinel, http://www.knoxnews.com [2]

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