

Lawsuits Centered On Natural Gas Royalties Move Forward

Steve Szkotak, AP

A federal judge has ruled that a handful of lawsuits accusing energy companies of cheating southwest Virginia landowners out of natural gas royalty payments can go forward as class actions, potentially involving thousands of landowners. In his ruling Monday, U.S. District Judge James P. Jones accepted the recommendation of a magistrate judge that the lawsuits be certified as class actions.

At stake is more than \$30 million in disputed natural gas royalties that are being held in an escrow account. Lawyers for the property owners say that the sum is much lower than what is actually owed to southwest residents. The lead attorney for the plaintiffs, Don Barrett, has said he will seek a summary judgment and a full accounting from the two energy companies named in the lawsuits.

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