

OpeningREMARKS

WATER POWERS A DIVISIVE DEBATE

A WORLD OF FRESH WATER SURROUNDS US, YET WE DON'T OFTEN THINK ABOUT ITS role in our lives. Beyond its extreme power to nurture or destroy life, its presence is rarely celebrated by folks who share an abundance of it and go about their daily lives taking it for granted. But, as anyone who relies on a well can tell you, when the well runs dry, a whole new perspective on water can flood the mind. Suddenly, such simple tasks as laundry, flushing the toilet, and filling the dog's water dish require strategic measures, most notably coming up with a game plan to acquire and haul water from elsewhere and use it as conservatively as possible.

I've experienced this scenario several times, and it's never fun to turn on a tap and hear the sucking sound of an empty water pipe. During a long dry spell last summer, we failed one day in our attempt to balance chores with the well's recovery time. Our kitchen faucet gurgled and sputtered, and spit nothing out. Fortunately, the well replenished itself after a couple days, but the incident served as a warning for us to mind our ways. If anything, such ordeals teach you the importance of water conservation and a deep appreciation for those around the globe who deal with the issue on a daily basis. For us, it may be a mere inconvenience, but for those in parched landscapes or with little or no access to safe drinking water, it can be a matter of survival.

Water resources management poses a worldwide challenge, and for many residents of New York State, the issue has surfaced in the fray over whether to allow the practice of high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, for shale gas, which has the potential to contaminate groundwater and surface water. Journalist Tom Wilber G'89, who has closely reported on the issue for several years, lays out the debate in this edition of the magazine, as well as the related work of a group of SU geologists and a College of Law alumnus (see page 34). It's a complex issue that has provoked a highly divisive political debate involving environmental concerns, public health, individual land rights, and economic development.

To be sure, there is a lot at stake, especially for those whose lands and livelihoods are riding on the outcome. Do we safeguard one precious natural resource and ensure its vitality for the future, or risk it for the economic rewards that come with another that we never seem to have enough of? That's a question everyone must consider, since we all need safe water and our addiction to fossil fuels isn't going to be cured anytime soon.



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