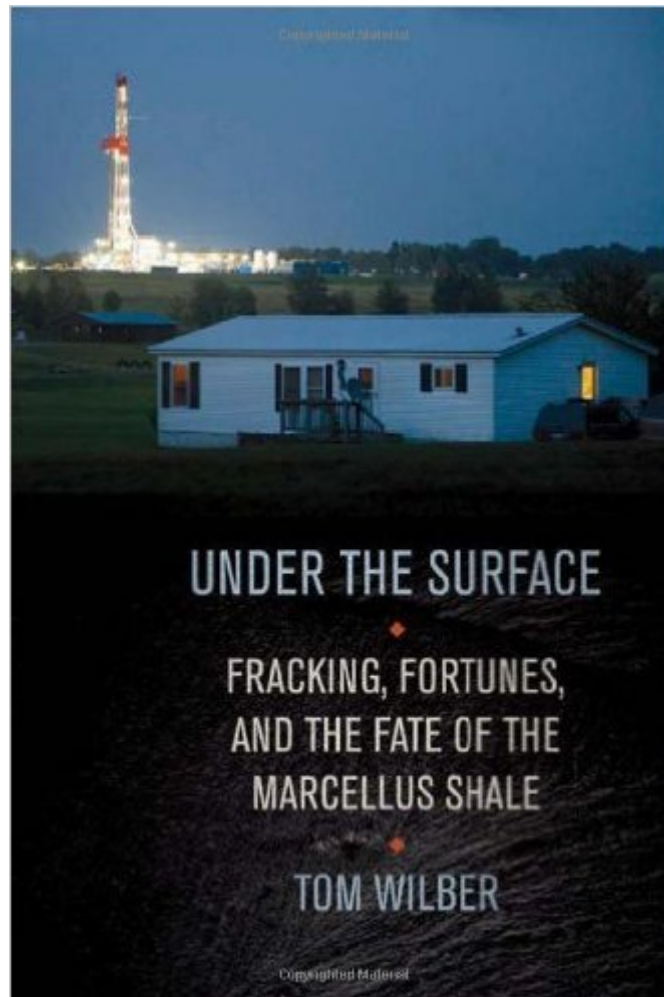


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Under The Surface: Fracking, Fortunes, And The Fate Of The Marcellus Shale



Synopsis

For the updated paperback edition of *Under the Surface*, Tom Wilber has written a new chapter and epilogue covering developments since the book's initial publication. Chief among these are the home rule movement and accompanying social and legal events leading up to an unprecedented ban of fracking in New York state, and the outcome of the federal EPA's investigation of water pollution just across the state border in Dimock, Pennsylvania. The industry, with powerful political allies, effectively challenged the federal government's attempts to intervene in drilling communities in Pennsylvania, Wyoming, and Texas with water problems. But it met its match in a grassroots movement known as "fractivism" that sprouted from seeds sown in upstate New York community halls and grew into one of the state's most influential environmental movements since Love Canal. Wilber weaves a narrative tracing the consequences of shale gas development in northeast Pennsylvania and central New York through the perspective of various stakeholders. Wilber's evenhanded treatment explains how the revolutionary process of fracking has changed both access to our domestic energy reserves and the lives of people living over them. He gives a voice to all constituencies, including farmers and landowners tempted by the prospects of wealth but wary of the consequences; policymakers struggling with divisive issues concerning free enterprise, ecology, and public health; and activists coordinating campaigns based on their respective visions of economic salvation and environmental ruin. Throughout the book, Wilber illustrates otherwise dense policy and legal issues in human terms and shows how ordinary people can affect extraordinary events.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was a bit cautious about *Under the Surface: Fracking, Fortunes, and the Fate of the Marcellus Shale*, worrying that a book on this topic by a journalist would mix fake objectivity with overly simple stories. I underestimated Wilber, though. *Under the Surface* achieves something better than the usual journalistic "and that's the way it is" or "he said, she said". Wilber's own voice comes through regularly to explain the big picture, and sometimes to explain his participation in a conversation or event, but most of the book is told through other people's voices. Perhaps most important, he chose a diverse enough group of voices that the book manages to avoid a simple pro- and anti-fracking polarization. The divide is there, and it grows over the course of the book, but he doesn't start there. By starting before fracking became an intense political issue and following a few key groups of people over time, he presents a much more complex and useful story. It's not clear at the beginning which way many participants will go, or how strongly. There are some major surprises in there, and enough sympathetic characters that many points of view can come across well. Whether you're a fracking opponent or a supporter, you should be able to find sympathetic characters in the book. I doubt a drilling supporter would read this book the same way that I did, and that's probably a good thing. I don't see the farmers trying to decide the future of their land or people trying to figure out how to survive in a place with contaminated water as villains. There are two groups of characters, however, who generally come off looking terrible: the gas companies themselves and the regulators.

Tom Wilber is a reporter who has followed the story of the Marcellus shale issue since 1999. His book unfolds like a mystery novel as the characters - landowners, landmen, legislators, entrepreneurs, corporate executives, environmental activists and others - interact in the diverging narratives of "fracking" in the Twin Tiers of New York and Pennsylvania. As a good journalist, Wilber is not arguing the case for or against fracking. Instead he gives us the "who, what, where, when" and the basic information that we need to understand the "why" of the boom (and, perhaps, the first signs of a bust) of slick water horizontal hydraulic fracturing of the Marcellus shale in Pennsylvania versus the continuing moratorium on this process in New York. For those of us in Ohio, this is a valuable cautionary tale. A thread running through the entire book is the contrast between two geologists - Terry Engelder of Penn State and Anthony "Tony" Ingraffea of Cornell - who exemplify the two sides of the fundamental dispute, "Should fracking be banned?" Whichever side one takes

in the debate, Wilber's diligence in uncovering how drilling companies and regulatory agencies actually function provides ample evidence for distrusting that even the best set of rules can make fracking safe. Calculating the cost/benefit ratio of fracking is up to the reader. David Margolick's back cover blurb says it well: "UNDER THE SURFACE represents a kind of reportorial fracking, in which the indefatigable Tom Wilber bores in to extract how the process has an impact on those atop or near that gas." For people in communities about to be impacted by fracking - or trying to prevent fracking - Wilber's book is a "must read."

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