

Study: Fracking saves water

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Hydraulic fracturing conserves water compared to other energy-generation methods, according to a recent study that undermines claims by fracking opponents.

Bridget Scanlon and a team of researchers at the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas compared the state's water consumption levels for 2010, a non-drought year, and 2011, a drought year, at the state's 423 power plants.

Even after accounting for the water used in obtaining natural gas from the ground, natural gas-powered plants use much less water to obtain the same amount of energy as coal-powered plants.

"Although water use for gas production is controversial, these data show that water saved by using natural gas combined cycle plants relative to coal steam turbine plants is 25-50 times greater than the amount of water used in hydraulic fracturing to extract the case," reads the report, published in Environmental Research Letters.

"Natural gas, now ~50% of power generation in Texas, enhances drought resilience by increasing the flexibility of power plants generators," the report continues. The researchers predict that reductions in water use from the increased use of natural gas will continue through 2030.

This is good news for the state of Texas, which is prone to drought. Even counting the amount of water used in the hydraulic fracturing process — which uses water and other chemicals to break shale below the earth's surface to free up natural gas — the researchers estimated that if Texas' natural gas plants had instead burned coal, the state would have used 32 billion gallons of extra water, enough to satiate 870,000 residents.

Scanlon and her team looked at what is known as the "water-energy nexus." Drought conditions can severely limit energy generation. In turn, the increased energy usage brought on by drought requires more precious water. But the recent study suggests that switching from other forms of energy generation, such as coal, would improve the drought situation.

"The bottom line is that hydraulic fracturing, by boosting natural gas production and moving the state from water-intensive coal technologies, makes our electric power system more drought resilient," said Scanlon in [a press release](#).

Environmentalists believe fracking is unsafe and have tried to regulate, and even ban, the drilling practice.

But Josiah Neeley, a policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, calls the new study smart, saying that it shows that fracking is "actually a net water saver" when compared to other energy generation methods.

"As with anything else, you have to compare fracking to the available alternatives, instead of looking at it in the abstract," Neeley told The Daily Caller News Foundation.

"The latest charge has been that fracking uses too much water," he said. "That's a big concern in Texas, because of the recent drought. What this study does is look not just at how much water gets used in fracking, but compares this to how much water you would need to generate the same amount of electricity from other sources."

Neeley said that this study pokes another hole in environmentalists' objections to fracking. "When each of them is proved baseless they simply move on to the next allegation," he concluded.

The recent report focused solely on Texas, but the researchers felt that the findings could apply to other states. "These changes in water and electricity in Texas may also apply to the US, which has

seen a 30% increase in natural gas consumption for electric power production since 2005.”

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