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February 7, 2013 · A new study is underway that takes a closer look at water use in hydraulic fracturing operations in and around the state.

A grant from the Robert and Patricia Switzer foundation is paying for the study on hydraulic fracturing in the eastern portion of the United States.

Downstream Strategies President, Evan Hansen, will collaborate with Switzer foundation scholars, and the non-profit organization Earthworks, to examine the impact of Marcellus shale drilling West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

"So this is an idea that I had along with a couple of the other Switzer fellows who also have an interest in trying to bring more scientific information to the debate about hydraulic fracturing," Hansen explains.

The project aims to benefit local and state efforts to regulate hydro fracturing by developing a Life Cycle Analysis of water.

"Essentially what we're trying to do is figure out exactly how much water is being used in drilling and fracking operations—where that water comes from and where it goes to. That will allow us to compare the water use for Marcellus gas production against other types of energy production in the country."

Hansen says they will compile data reported by the oil and gas industry to state regulatory agencies. He says the Natural Gas Horizontal Wells Control Act of 2011 requires companies to list details about water usage.

"Gas drilling companies report where they're getting their water from, how much water they inject into the ground, how much water is recovered, and where they dispose of it. And there are similar types of information available in neighboring states. So that's the data we're using—the self-reporting data from the industry."

One challenge Hansen and his colleagues face is the time which it takes operators to report their water usage. He says they often aren't required to report right away.

"Another challenge is that the reporting requirements are new. So we are trying to be very careful about the data quality. And when we're noticing things in the data base that don't seem like they are necessarily correct, we're double-checking those and even removing data from the data base unless it really looks like it's correct."

Hansen says research has been underway for a couple months and that findings will be made available by the end of 2013.

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