

Frackonomics 227: St Tammany Opinion



C.E. Kirby

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Summary:

The “Part 2” written responses before and after Louisiana Department of Natural Resources open meeting on November 12, 2014 at Lakeshore High School were examined as a public opinion survey. These data show that from **68% to 82% of St Tammany residents opposed the DNR’s permitting of the proposed Helis well.**

This is also an estimate of the St Tammany resident opposition to fracking.

Introduction:

On November 12, 2014 the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources held a public hearing in St Tammany at Lakeshore High School. The purpose of the meeting was for the DNR to hear public comments regarding the issuance of a drilling permit to Helis Oil and Gas for drilling in St Tammany parish.

The DNR had written comment periods, before and after the public hearing, whereby any interested party could submit to the DNR written comments they felt ought to be considered as part of the DNR’s evaluation. This analysis looks at these submissions only, called by the DNR as “Written Statements Part 2 Submitted to the Office of Conservation Before and After Hearing”¹.

These comments are a valuable data source for St Tammany because:

- They offer an insight into the public’s attitude towards oil and gas extraction, and more specifically, fracking in St Tammany parish
- The data base is diverse, broad based, and sufficiently large to allow quantitative analysis
- The various arguments put forward by respondents are available for examination

These data are not as valid or rigorous as an independently conducted, comprehensive study by an unbiased agency, polling representative groups of St Tammany residents. However, these data are publically available and can be considered reasonably representative of all of St Tammany’s opinion. Unlike a survey of, for example, members of the Sierra Club or the Northshore Business Council members, these responses can provide a much more representative estimate of St Tammany’s total sentiment regarding the permitting of oil drilling in St Tammany. Also, by logical extension, these data concurrently reveal public sentiment towards fracking, since it was Helis’ public position they ultimately intended to utilize hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) at the proposed drill site.

If one assumes equal energy for the supporters of the Helis permit and those opposed to the permit it is possible to use standard consumer data analysis techniques to develop the Part 2 written responses into a simple opinion survey composed of two groups:

- “Approve” : this group supported the DNR issuing a drilling permit to Helis Oil and Gas
- “Deny”: this group would have the DNR deny Helis’s drilling permit application

¹ See Appendix for LA DNR website address

Methodology:

The mechanics of culling through the comments and evaluating each individual response is more fully covered in the Appendix. Briefly: two breakouts of the data were tabulated: “All Respondents” and “St Tammany Residents and Landowners”.

For the “All Respondents” tabulation:

- Each individual respondent was tabulated as one
- Respondents clearly non US citizens were omitted
- Organizational responses were counted as an individual response
- 90% of total signatures (216) on 3 petitions were considered valid and counted

For the “St Tammany Residents and Landowners” tabulation:

- All organizations, non US citizens, non St Tammany residents, and petitions were excluded
- St Tammany residents and all Landowners (regardless of residency location) were included

Respondents not clearly indicating “Approve” or “Deny” were omitted. Typically, these respondents (14) used the phrase “Please consider...” and did not definitively indicate their position regarding the permit issuance.

Data:

The two tabulations are shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Summary of DNR Part 2 Written Responses

	Total	Deny Permit	Approve Permit	Deny vs. Approve	95% Confidence Limits	Approximate Ratio Deny/Approve	Comment
All Respondents	n = 435	n = 355	n = 80	82% vs. 18%	+ / - 3.6%	4:1	Excludes foreign
St Tammany Residents and Landowners	n = 154	n = 105	n = 49	68% vs. 32%	+ / - 7.4%	2:1	Excludes organizations, petitions, foreign, and non STP respondents

(Note: n = number)

Results Comments:

Breakouts: Both breakouts show the Deny group to be statistically significantly larger, with proportions ranging from 68% to 82% of total respondents for each breakout.

Organizational Support: Both groups had organizational responses as follows:

- Deny:
 1. Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN)
 2. Sierra Club
 3. League of Women Voters

- Approve:
 1. Louisiana Oil and Gas Association (LOGA)
 2. Louisiana Mid Continent Oil and Gas Association (LMOGA)
 3. North Shore Business Council (NBC)
 4. Greater New Orleans (GNO)
 5. Louisiana Geological Society
 6. St Tammany Land Company

Petitions: Inclusion of the 3 Deny petitions in the All Respondents group impacts the magnitude of the 82% Deny response. However, note that removing the petitions, as is shown for the “St Tammany Residents and Landowners” breakout, only shifts the results somewhat to 68% Deny. This doesn’t change the conclusion: The Deny group is significantly larger than the Approve group. These two approaches bracket the size of the Deny/Approve ratio from about 2:1 to about 4:1, depending on how one handles the petitions.

Themes: While determining whether a respondent was an Approve or Deny was relatively easy, categorizing the many themes of the responses was not. Most responses included multiple themes and no attempt was made to track, prioritize, or quantify these. Overall, the major themes were generally:

- Deny:
 1. Environmental/Nature
 2. Quality of life loss
 3. Health & Safety Risk

- Approve:
 1. Affirmation of No/Low technical risks
 2. Rightful Exercise of Property Rights
 3. Economic Positives

Note that both groups mentioned the technical risks associated with fracking but differ in their assessment as to the size of that risk. To the Approve group the risks are minimal and therefore worth

the economic benefits; to the Deny group the technical risks associated with fracking are significant and outweigh the benefits.

The Deny group primarily mentioned quality of life issues (clean water, health and safety, etc) and a concern these would deteriorate as a result of drilling and fracking. The Approve group did not generally mention quality of life issues, suggesting this group either believes there will be no changes to these areas or accepts any change as worth the perceived benefits.

Conclusions:

1. These broad based data suggest that **St Tammany residents opposed the DNR granting the drilling permit to Helis by a margin of from 2:1 up to about 4:1.**
2. By logical extension these data suggest that St Tammany citizens oppose fracking in St Tammany by a similar margin.
3. The Approver and Deny groups differ in their assessment of the risks associated with oil drilling and fracking.

C.E. Kirby

About the Author: C.E. “Chuck” Kirby has a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from New Jersey Institute of Technology and 35 years of Research and Development work experience. He has been a resident of St Tammany parish since 2009 and retired in St Tammany for its natural beauty and its friendly people.

Previous Reports: *Frackonomics 201: St Tammany and the Wizard*, November 2014

Frackonomics 211: Children and the Wizard, December 2014

Frackonomics 221: St Tammany as the Jobs Goose, January 2015

Frackonomics 225: Oil Drilling Revenue in St Tammany Parish, February 2015

Previously Shared: as *Frackonomics 101: Shale and Wall Street: Was the Decline in Natural Gas*

Prices Orchestrated ? by Deborah Rodgers, February 2013

Appendix

The Part 2 DNR Written Response pdf file is about 1433 pages long and contains many repeats of letters and material, likely due to the procedure DNR used to compile the responses and individuals submitting responses more than once. There were many out of parish, and out of country responses. There were submissions by organizations (i.e. LOGA) as well as (3) signature petitions. This was tabulated as follows to arrive at a single, valid data base:

1. Duplicate responses of the same submission were counted as 1 individual response
2. Multiple, different responses by the same individual were counted as 1 individual response
3. When organizations were indicated they were counted as 1 individual response
4. Petitions were counted in Total Respondents as 90% of the counted signatures (216)
5. Petitions were excluded in the St Tammany and Landowner group to remove the impact of this large response group
6. Single responses with multiple signees (i.e. husband and wife) were counted as 1 response
7. Identical (form) letters with different signees were counted as multiple responses
8. Residency for the St Tammany and Landowner group was evaluated as follows:
 - a. declared as a resident of St Tammany = yes
 - b. address was in St Tammany = yes
 - c. indicated as non resident = no
 - d. address was outside St Tammany = no
 - e. address not indicated but not foreign = yes
 - f. landowners regardless of residence location = yes
9. Responses not explicitly indicating preference (i.e. "Consider...") were not counted in either breakout
10. Responses judged foreign due to language were not counted in either breakout
11. Responses were examined for content and broadly categorized for message. Since most responses contained multiple messages (land rights, environment, water, technical risks, etc) quantitatively tracking all these was not attempted. Some qualitative trends were noted.

The DNR Part 2 Written Comments file can be found at:

<http://dnr.louisiana.gov/assets/OC/6WrittenStatementsPart2beforeorafterhearing.pdf>