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Today's News

Ontario not on list for drillers

There might be some gas fields, but there's a state ban and little interest.

Monday, July 9, 2001

By Chris Iven

Natural gas exploration companies are hoping to drill beneath several Great Lakes, but Lake Ontario is not on their list, according to government and industry experts.

New York bans drilling beneath Lake Ontario - either from off-shore rigs or on-shore angled wells.

State law does allow companies to lease land beneath Lake Erie for drilling, but so far, none have shown interest, said Randy Nemecek, mineral resources program manager for the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Even in Lake Erie, drilling for oil is prohibited because of the risk of an environmentally damaging spill. Nemecek said. Gas wells that reach oil must be capped, he said.

Canada has let companies drill 550 wells in its part of Lake Erie, but none have been drilled in the northern part of Lake Ontario, said Rudy Rybanski, chief engineer of the petroleum resources center at the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

"The geology generally doesn't support any interest," Rybanski said.

Joe Robinson, a Syracuse University emeritus professor of geology, isn't so sure.

His reading of some Canadian geological maps shows that

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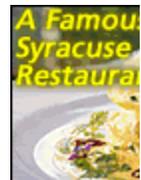
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profitable gas fields are possible in Lake Ontario. Also, gas fields in Oswego County and elsewhere on the south shore could indicate a good supply of gas beneath the lake, Robinson said.

Robinson said he knows of no companies interested in drilling into Lake Ontario. Still, he said, the state Energy Research and Development Authority should sponsor geological surveys of the lake, as it has for areas on land.

"It'd be nice to find out what's down there," he said.

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