

Pinedale Roundup

Newspaper of the Upper Green River Valley

Accountability needed before more drilling

By Mary Lynn Worl

Published: May 29th, 2008, Pinedale Roundup, Page 6

We all have a place we can call home. For some, home is four walls and a roof. For others, home is more broadly the people and things that make up a community. I'm one of many individuals who consider the open spaces and natural environment of Sublette County to be part of my home. Regardless of how we define a home, they give us a place to be at ease, to share laughter and sorrows, to raise our families, to get a dog and cat. We should feel secure and safe in our homes.

One of the highest moral duties of our government is to protect the security and safety of our lands, homes and communities. But in my home of Pinedale, the government is failing us.

Natural gas exploration and development is one of the most toxic industries in the nation, yet many loopholes in government regulations allow the gas industry to pollute our environment and jeopardize the health of citizens and communities. As the entire state of Wyoming is surely aware of by now, Pinedale has problems, and these go deeper than the ozone pollution that has made the headlines. Air pollution is certainly a major concern, but at the last count, 88 wells have been identified that exceed a groundwater standard, and 15 of these wells have exceeded federal health standards for drinking water. Our views are disappearing, our streets are increasingly full of heavy traffic, and our schools and town are faced with new challenges, several being increases in drug usage and crime rate.

Maybe we shouldn't be blaming the oil and gas companies for all of this. They are, after all, only doing what their shareholders and company executives demand. Profit before health seems to be the motto. The Bureau of Land Management has not been a shining example of public accountability. The original guiding document for the Pinedale Anticline was filled with ambiguity and wiggle room that it's no wonder the gas companies were able to run roughshod with it. This original plan has led to water pollution, wildlife depredation, and air degradation. This unaccountability isn't limited to the Pinedale Anticline either. Recently the Forest Service was caught redhanded being overly cozy with oil and gas player Stanley Energy. One of our public agencies actually signed a secret legal agreement that gave a vested corporate interest undue influence in the

decision of a public process.

What does this mean for the new drilling plan the BLM is currently working on for the Pinedale Anticline? I think it means we need to learn from the lessons of the past before we get another ambiguous, un-enforceable plan that continues to threaten the health, welfare, and security of the greater Pinedale community. We need accountability and action now! Unfortunately, the enemy of accountability is ambiguity, and that appears to be the strategy of the BLM. Several months ago the Environmental Protection Agency blasted BLM for absolutely failing to connect the dots between the proposed 4,400 new wells and the resulting impacts to our air and water resources. Since this EU-3 letter they have been in closed-door "negotiations." In order for a process to be trustworthy it needs to be visible. The concerns that were first raised by conservationists, then the EPA, and now by every-day citizens of Pinedale are significant enough to warrant a newly revised draft plan released to the public with a full opportunity to participate and respond. Such a plan should address every single concern the EPA brought to light; it should contain a comprehensive health analysis so locals can understand the full magnitude of what is happening here, and it should contain real checks, limitations, and enforcement measures so we don't fall into the same trap again. Anything less is selling us and all of Wyoming short.

In an ideal world, our policy representative would set the public welfare as their highest objective. In the real world, our agencies are pandering to the needs of oil and gas industry instead of addressing the health concerns of Wyoming citizens. In the real world, published opinions like this are needed to pressure our government into action. Safe and secure communities and environments are what really matter in the drilling debate.

Mary Lynn Worl is a Pinedale resident.