

Pinedale Roundup

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Plenty of myths from gas industry

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If you've got gas, you are in for a world of change. The power struggle over your gas will forever change your life.

The race to develop natural gas on the Anticline is not about air, water or even wildlife. It is about power: power to heat homes, create jobs, fuel city lights and make money. The downside is the loss of small town life quality for those who have (or live above) gas.

How can industry foul our air, poison our water and sacrifice our wildlife? They call it "Adaptive Management." They manage and we adapt. At least one backpacking, insurance-peddling shutterbug has adapted, so why not me? I'll tell you why:

Twenty years ago when the Mesa (Anticline) was leased, the BLM required future operations to be limited in the winter to protect wildlife. Industry begrudgingly purchased their leases figuring they could abide by these standard stipulations and still make money. There was the chance they could waive these federal regulations by getting the RIGHT man in the White House. They did!

Adolf Hitler once said: "If you say a lie loudly and repeat it enough the people will believe it." Lie is a bit harsh, so I will refer to industry's claims as myths.

Myth # 1: "Year-round access will stabilize the economy." Our local economy has been in chaos since Mickey McMurry sold the Jonah to EnCana. This Canadian based gas company has pulled out all the stops to develop a "World Class Gas Field" by bringing in drillers, roustabouts, consultants from all over the world, industrialized a once serene desert landscape and still wants more wells. They are building a "Man Camp" on the Public Domain, something no common citizen could do.

Housing shortages, full motels (no vacancy for tourists) and a higher cost of living soon followed. After over 10 years, no reclamation of well pads has met the Jonah Interagency Office's (JIO) standards.

Myth # 2: "Year-round access will clean your air." Granted, our air is dirty enough without year-round access, but won't more rigs during temperature inversions (winter) further foul our air? Wyoming DEQ continues to issue Ozone Alerts and claims they just didn't know and still don't know what to do. My first Ozone Alert came in 2005 when I took my daughter to the Questar City, Boulder, Daniel and Pinedale to measure ozone for her Middle School Science Fair Project.

Questar City was way above the National Standard then. The press and DEQ interviewed my daughter: They knew then, as Perry Walker has pointed out numerous times, that ozone could be (is) a problem.

Myth # 3: "Year-round access will provide balance for wildlife." There are volumes of studies that reveal what biologists have theorized for years: Drilling during winter is bad for wildlife. Deer, pronghorn and sage grouse numbers attest to this.

Many of these studies were funded by industry, not the Game and Fish Department, BLM or EPA, so I guess industry has interpretation rights: "Adaptive Management" should resolve these conflicts they say. I know of no self-respecting biologist who agrees.

Myth # 4: "Industry can't afford to "DO IT RIGHT" without year-round access. They just can't plan ahead." Actually, multiple wells from one pad, liquid gathering systems and fewer truck trips makes good sense economically and can be planned to include a winter hiatus. It doesn't have to be 11/15-5 /1, there are areas on the Mesa that could be accessed between those dates with little impact to wildlife. We proved that in Big Piney years ago.

Industry does not need "Carte Blanche" year-round access to plan or make money. It does take some commitment and professionals who know the field. One cannot create resource balance on a computer or with a model. It takes field experience.

I pray that BLM returns to the field from which they came and can overcome the politics that are upon them. I trust that Chuck Otto can reunite his charge to the field in the name of multiple-use management

Adaptive Management does not work as defined by industry. The proof is in the fate of the PAWG and JIO. It's all a play by industry to reduce restrictions, a power play that started 20 years ago when BLM managed for multiple uses, the Game and Fish Department was strong and citizens cared. I pray that we can somehow get back to that.

So why did industry create these myths if they already get whatever they want from BLM? First, I think they believe them, contrary to scientific fact. Second, they don't want to be known as the "Bad Guys" who ruined our air, water and wildlife. Most of all, they're scared the American Public might elect a President and Congress who truly care about our children's future, the environment, and will mandate BLM to return to multiple-use management. We just might do that.

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