



COMMENTARY

Coming To the Table

By Mark Preiss

Talking. Listening. These tools are vital to finding common ground between varied interests and they are tools that the conservation movement relies on heavily in our work. In the past year we've sat down at the table with oil and gas industry representatives, federal land managers, the governor's staff, Senator Thomas's aides, special interest groups, private citizens, state officials, scientists and other conservation groups to try to figure out what is best for Wyoming's people, its environment, and its quality of life. Sometimes these meetings succeed in finding a way to balance conflicting viewpoints, sometimes they don't.

In last week's Pinedale Roundup, Perry Walker challenged conservationists to talk to groups such as EnCana to find ways to mitigate the impacts of oil and gas development on wildlife and air quality in the Upper Green River Valley. We agree that this is an important step and want to clarify the fact that we have pursued—and will continue to pursue—this strategy. We've met with EnCana. We've met with Shell. We've also met with the land managers and officials who are responsible for enforcing the laws that protect our public lands. These meetings have been productive and informative and we are optimistic that many of the oil and gas companies working in Wyoming are genuinely interested in seeking ways to minimize the negative effects of their work on

our precious wildlife and air quality. We hope to keep working with them.

However, good intentions and well-meant conversations don't always translate into needed on-the-ground action.

The move to allow Questar to increase the size of its winter operations is an example of a situation where in theory everyone is in agreement about the problem but the solution suggested by the Bureau of Land Management seems to simply ignore this consensus.

Scientific studies show that oil and gas development on the Anticline is having a severely negative effect on mule deer populations. Science also shows that mule deer are more susceptible to stress in winter. In addition, science clearly indicates that the Anticline provides crucial winter range for mule deer. Yet in spite of this agreement and knowledge, the BLM is allowing Questar to expand its operations on the Anticline this winter. We weren't even given a chance to come to the table to talk about this one.

Democracy works best when people are informed, involved and included. Closed-door negotiations such as what took place with Questar have no place in a democratic society.

You can only come to the table and seek solutions when the table is open and the conversation in good faith. We are willing—even eager—to engage in that kind of dialogue.

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