

Western Colorado Congress Passes City Watershed Ordinance

Grand Junction City Council members had two options at their September 6th public hearing: they could pass the watershed ordinance themselves or send it to the city voters in November where it would surely be voted into law. They wisely passed it unanimously at the meeting.

Western Colorado Congress had drafted the watershed ordinance to be similar to the ordinance that was roundly criticized by the oil and gas industry and voted down by the Grand Junction City Council three years ago.

Western Colorado Congress's renewed effort to pass a watershed ordinance was in response to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) leasing portions of the northwest side of the Grand Mesa – our watershed – for gas drilling. Members of Concerned Citizen Alliance (Western Colorado Congress' Mesa County chapter) and other people from our community had, in less than three weeks, gathered 4,270 signatures to put a watershed protection ordinance on the November ballot.

Members and Leaders Voice their Concerns

Peggy Rawlins, who endured 100+ degree heat in late July to walk door-to-door to get signatures for the initiative, was one of the first speakers.

Rawlins related her experience living in Garfield County and working with our Garfield County chapter, Grand Valley Citizens Alliance. "I have first-hand knowledge of property owners in Garfield County who had their wells blown up or water damaged beyond use," Rawlins related. She went on to remind the City Council that over 1,000 spills have been self-reported by the industry since 2002. "One hundred eighty-three of those spills resulted in contamination of surface or ground water," she said.

Western Colorado Congress Board Member Bill Grant, who had spent his July evenings chasing down people to sign the petition, spoke as well. "We are here because a great number of Grand Junction citizens have asked that protection of our watershed be put into law," Grant said.

Grant described his online research on newly-formed Genesis Oil and Gas LLC out of Kansas City that is proposing to drill in the watershed. Genesis is preparing to sell all of its projects or perhaps the entire company in less than five years. "That does not strike me as the type of company we want to sit down with and think we are negotiating a good-neighbor policy," Grant commented. "This is a company that has invested some money, wants to get in, make a quick killing, sell it all, and move out."

Western Colorado Congress had more than 60 volunteers who helping to collect petition signatures.



Not a single person spoke out against the watershed ordinance.

Grand Junction Mayor Jim Doody summed up the frustration the City Council had with the BLM's decision to lease within their watershed. "Then along comes Western Colorado Congress and they were able to, in just a short amount of time, put together 4,200 signatures and bring this issue to us. That's powerful. That's my constituents and all of our constituents saying to the Council, 'Protect our watershed,'" he said.

The unanimous vote by the City Council received a standing ovation.

Many of the Council members referred to the watershed ordinance as "an important tool" to protect water quality. Western Colorado Congress wants to share this tool with other communities throughout the Western Slope.

If you are interested in whether a watershed ordinance could help protect the water quality of your city or town, please contact Matt Sura at Western Colorado Congress at 970-256-7650.

—Matt Sura, Energy Organizer,
Western Colorado Congress