

STATEMENT BY NANCY SORENSON

Law and Order in the Oil & Gas Fields Report

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For the last 31 years I have lived on a ranch in northern Campbell County near the place that was homesteaded by my husband's ancestors over one hundred years ago. My son and his family represent the fifth generation to engage in the ranching industry in this area. It has been a privilege and a great responsibility to maintain the integrity of our land to make sure it is better than when we arrived.

We are experiencing extensive coal bed methane development on our place and it has been a mixed blessing at best and heartbreaking at worst. It is not my desire to prevent development of Wyoming's natural resources. I have seen the short term benefits to our state. But I am troubled by the fact that while there seems to be so much lip service being paid to improving oversight, nothing much seems to change on the ground.

Bonding at the state and federal level is not even close to the real costs of reclaiming the land and that of ranches that are down gradient from ours. Landowners have a difficult time negotiating with powerful energy companies for a fair damage settlement when they have no legal rights for collection of those damages.

For folks who experience damage from water discharges downstream from development or who experience the loss of their wells in the vicinity of development, but have no actual development on land that they own, the situation is even more drastic. As recently as January 23, a toxic spill from a gas well located on state land on the Beartooth Front in Park County, Wyoming, entered a nearby irrigation ditch. Attempts by the company to contain the spill resulted in even more of the toxic substance to enter and contaminate the irrigation system. In spite of being contacted by the owners of the ditch, no agency has come to look at the situation or even respond to the landowner. These agencies include the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the Wyoming Emergency Management Commission, the Governor's Office, the Wyoming Office of State Lands, the Wyoming Oil and Gas Commission, and the oil company involved.

Huge containment reservoirs placed in ephemeral streambeds actually block naturally occurring runoff, while causing excessive and unnatural amounts of coal bed methane product water to flow onto irrigators land. This water is high in sodium compared to calcium and magnesium and cause irreparable damage to the soils and vegetation. Other huge off channel pits designed to infiltrate to shallow groundwater aquifers cause changes to those zones and often resurface down stream to cause similar damage to the soils.

It is very telling that landowners in my area are using EC monitoring and paying for lab tests from their own pockets to check for changes in their pristine creeks that they rely on for irrigating their ranches and farms. This should be done by state and federal agencies, but it is not.

Well over 17,000 wells have been drilled in the Powder River Basin in the last 10 years and 30,000 more are being planned. We are only seeing the tip of the iceberg. The cumulative effects of this extensive development are not being considered adequately by the state and federal regulators. The increased traffic, the dust and pollution from generators and compressors, the disruption of our enterprises are not being adequately addressed.

Ranching in Wyoming comes with the responsibility to protect and improve the land while attempting to make a living there. Development of natural resources and ranching do not have to be mutually exclusive, but we need to make sure that ranchers have the tools and support of regulatory agencies to meet their responsibilities on the land.