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Dread storm rising

- [R.P. WALKER - Perspective trib.com](#) | Posted: Sunday, December 5, 2010 12:00 am

Two recent stories in the state press are very illustrative of the dismal future awaiting Wyoming. There should be added to this list a story about the dogmatic attitudes of our dominant Republican Party, aided and abetted by a nearly extinct Democratic Party that itself is no better than a moderate wing of the Republicans. In a nutshell, neither sees intrinsic value in anything that is not, nor does not generate green pieces of paper bearing a presidential portrait.

The latter was well validated by Gov. Dave Freudenthal in his second term of office when in Sublette County, he hatched a toothless set of "guidelines" to "protect" the dwindling population of sage grouse from gas well activity, agreed to a paltry 36 million highly coveted dollars from industry in return for year-round devastation of the Pinedale Anticline wintering deer herd, and then had the hutzpah to sarcastically declare that environmental protection was "in the eye of the beholder."

The press story describing gas well development in western Wyoming should give cause for concern. When one runs the numbers there are two and a quarter million acres destined to be scraped and raped to support 21,000 wells -- for starters. Nothing is said regarding the future "infill" growth of many of those projects that will compound the damage. Pollution of the air will increase because the Department of Environmental Quality and the Bureau of Land Management will continue their collusion with Encana, Shell, and EOG, who are the worst players, followed closely by Ultra, BP America, and the others; and EPA won't step up to the plate because Cheyenne is successfully holding it at bay with a bizarre "Tea Party"-like concept of "state's rights." As for DEQ in particular, the other press story referenced above becomes relevant.

That story addressed a concern in some circles that DEQ may be our own chapter of the failed federal Minerals Management Service from the Bush/Cheney Dark Age. In fact, there is a body of evidence contained in DEQ's own records with regard to Sublette County alone that supports the allegation. One can go back to 2005 where DEQ and other federal entities declared that year to be the baseline against which future air pollutant behavior would be regulated -- a year when the local atmosphere was already evidencing serious visibility impairment and the odor of hydrocarbons was pervading the Jonah, Anticline, and LaBarge fields because of gas development

Then in 2009, Encana proposed and DEQ eagerly embraced a scheme that created a NOx/VOC credits trading process. When challenged that this trade concept fell outside DEQ authority, it pondered for a month and came up with the innovative procedural dodge that the concept was implemented under "interim guidelines" and the public had no option to challenge such guidelines. That "interim" measure is soon to reach its two-year birthday. Furthermore, one

operator has just leveraged its credits as an asset sweetener attached to well holdings being sold to another operator, with DEQ blessing.

Most recently regarding the Sublette County ozone problem, DEQ has published a 28-page opus arguing that two 2007 ozone high reading events were the result of "stratospheric intrusion," meaning that Mother Nature did it. DEQ thus expended significant resources to avoid regulation that should be applied to actual regulation; clearly, DEQ is desperate to avoid crossing the threshold of non-attainment because the "inconvenience" that would place upon the gas guys would be draconian.

Further evidence of collusion/incompetence/timidity by DEQ and EPA can be invoked regarding the pollution of ground water but space here is insufficient. Suffice it to say that private sources tell of EPA reluctance to reveal the impact to ground water by drilling in the Pavillion region because of the uproar likely to follow.

Unfortunately for our state's natural beauty, nature has also bestowed all the raw materials necessary to a technological world and that creates the specter in 100 years of Wyoming resembling a science fiction industrial wasteland -- a superfund site stretching from one boundary to the other; pits where coal mines existed; abandoned well pads stretching hundreds of miles like some giant prairie dog colony; ground water aquifers polluted by gas well hydrocarbon leaks and dissolved uranium waste from Russian-owned Canadian front company mines; and alpine forests and lakes dead from acidification due to down-wind rain-out of nitrogen and sulfur compounds from gas fields.

Wyoming natives and state government had better stand up now for the imposition of tighter regulations on all energy-related raw material extraction. Thus far, the industry is treating Wyoming like a third world country and succeeding because it has a stranglehold on our local, state, and federal elected "representatives" as well as our university from which technological solutions should be emanating to enable environmental protection and resource extraction.

Despite industry's crocodile tears to the effect that it "cares," the truth is that its people are petro braceros who know they are here for a limited engagement and therefore don't give a damn about the storm of chemical destruction they will leave behind. After all, we and they will be dead in 100 years, so why not kick the environmental can down the road?

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