

The CBM Water Discharge Problem

For the last 6 to 7 years coal bed methane development has produced untold millions of gallons of waste water. In fact, according to the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission website in 2005, over 557 million barrels of water were produced and discharged from CBM wells in the Powder River Basin. There are many CBM wells that have not produced any gas at all for over two years but they continue to discharge water. This water has just run down the streams and draws and goes unused, never to be recovered. No one even knows or seems to want to know how many folks have lost their domestic and livestock water wells, or have had to dig new deeper wells for water because of this development. The damage to the surface downstream may be even more dramatic.

Landowners on Wildhorse Creek, Spotted Horse Creek, Deadhorse Creek, Wildcat Creek and other ephemeral drainages have struggled with downstream flooding or too much CBM discharge water which has interfered with natural irrigation and damaged soils, plants and trees. The water is high in sodium and does not mix with the clay soils. Large volumes of water which stand on hay meadows and pasture land for long periods of time will cause damage even if that water tests as high quality. In the ephemeral drainages where CBM water is continuously discharged the meadows and soil are ruined and trees have been drowned. The methane water is creating an environmental disaster on ephemeral drainages and the important meadows and bottom lands. When the Governor saw these pictures last week he urged us to make sure that every legislator saw the pictures to illustrate the damage that has happened.

Who is responsible for this disaster? The CBM companies say they have the right to ruin anyone downstream from development because they have been issued a permit from the DEQ to do this. The State Engineer has said the water is a beneficial use because the gas is produced and so the SEO is doing nothing to protect the other interests impacted by the waste of this water. The DEQ refuses to stop the degradation because it claims it is prevented from regulating the quantity of water. So, downstream landowners are suffering the damages and bearing the costs of industry and the state's failure to deal with the CBM discharge water in a responsible manner. The companies that caused the problem are avoiding the costs of disposing the water in a responsible manner.

Protecting our water quality, our pastures, and our land surface will not make it unprofitable to produce gas. We can and should do things in both a profitable way AND an environmentally sound way. Industry is managed this way in other jurisdictions. Why not in Wyoming?

CBM Downstream Flooding on Wildhorse Creek May 2005



CBM Downstream Flooding Wildhorse Creek February 2006



CBM Downstream Flooding Wildhorse Creek November 2006



CBM Downstream Flooding Wildhorse January 2007



CBM Downstream Flooding & Damage on Spotted Horse Creek 2000



CBM Downstream Flooding, Vegetation & Soil Damage on Wild Cat Creek 2000



CBM Discharge & Downstream Flooding on SA Creek 2005



CBM Reservoirs and Downstream Damage from Flooding on Deadhorse Creek 2003-2004



CBM Discharge & Flooding on Cat Creek May 2006



Sue Draw Before & After CBM Discharge

