

# Group asks EPA to intervene in water permits

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CHEYENNE -- A conservation group has asked the Environmental Protection Agency to stop the state of Wyoming from issuing some coal-bed methane water discharge permits.

The Powder River Basin Resource Council made the request Thursday after a report found the state is using a scientifically flawed formula to set pollution limits on discharged water for agricultural use.

The council contends the state Department of Environmental Quality's permitting process allows industry to dump large amounts of water that damages the soil with excessive sodium and salt.

"Industry has been telling them how to write these permits so industry can dump their water the cheapest way possible," Jill Morrison, an organizer with the Sheridan-based council, said Friday.

DEQ Director John Corra was out of the office Friday and unavailable for comment.

The state is responsible for enforcing the Clean Water Act in Wyoming, but the EPA can intervene if it finds Clean Water Act violations, said Bruce Kent, environmental scientist with the EPA's regional office in Denver.

Kent said the office had not yet received the resource council's letter on Friday.

Wyoming's coal-bed methane industry has thrived in the past decade. The development in northeast Wyoming has resulted in large quantities of water being pumped to the surface in order to recover the gas trapped in underground coal seams.

The coal-bed water has been a blessing and curse for farmers and ranchers in the Powder River Basin, depending on its quality and quantity. Some can use the water to irrigate crops and water livestock, while others contend the water damages their land and vegetation.

The Wyoming Environmental Quality Council, which promulgates state environmental regulations, has wrestled with rules to protect agriculture from coal-bed methane development.

It hired independent soil scientists to look at the formula and science used by the DEQ to help determine whether the methane water was damaging to soil.

The final report issued this month found the DEQ formula and science to be flawed.

Campbell County rancher Eric Barlow said the water has damaged his land and he wasn't optimistic that the state would remedy the situation despite the report's findings.

"What the result will be is probably unfortunately more of the same with a different justification," Barlow said.