

Wyo enviro groups want EPA's ear

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Energy and environmental stakeholders who are sometimes at odds seemed to agree that this week's visit by Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson is a good thing for Wyoming.

However, some have complained that Jackson might have more face time with representatives of energy companies in Wyoming rather than with citizens with concerns about how energy development has been managed in recent years.

As a result, some citizens and landowner groups have either submitted written comments directly to Jackson or to Gov. Dave Freudenthal's office to pass along to Jackson. One of those groups is the Powder River Basin Resource Council.

"We hope all of this information will give administrator Jackson an informed view of the real issues facing Wyoming citizens," Ed Swartz, PRBRC member, said in a prepared statement. "We welcome EPA into this discussion and hope the state listens seriously to what they have to say."

Jackson is in Wyoming at the invitation of Freudenthal. Her tour of Wyoming began Wednesday morning with a visit to the Happy Jack wind farm outside of Cheyenne. The tour continues today with a visit to natural gas operations in the Jonah Field in Sublette County and a visit to the Black Thunder coal mine in Campbell County.

The PRBRC used the EPA visit as an opportunity to list off a number of concerns related to energy development:

- There are regular violations of particulate matter (dust) standards in the Powder River Basin coal-bed methane gas and coal mining district.
- Some prime pastureland has suffered from the flushing of coal-bed methane water down draws in the Powder River Basin.
- Citizens in the Pavillion area in the central part of the state believe oil and gas development has resulted in air and water contamination.

"Our drinking water is contaminated and people's health is being impacted -- we need the EPA to help us get the contamination stopped and the mess cleaned up," Pavillion area farmer John Fenton said in a prepared statement.

Linda Baker of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition noted that ozone concentrations, because of burgeoning natural gas development in the Pinedale area, have exceeded standards for human health many times in recent years.

In addition, measured visibility impairment has exceeded standards of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service (both of which are outside the EPA's jurisdiction).

"I would hope that the EPA, looking at the air quality situation in Sublette County, would consider encouraging the BLM to conduct a comprehensive health impact assessment," Baker told the Star-Tribune.

One issue the EPA will deal with directly is the natural gas industry's use of hydraulic fracturing and the concern about whether the practice threatens drinking water. Baker said several industrial wells in the area have high levels of contaminants.

Baker said there's not been enough monitoring to know whether drinking water supplies are at risk.

"I would hope that administrator Jackson takes a second look at hydraulic fracturing and makes sure it is safe for drinking water supplies, and at least allow disclosure (of chemicals used in fracturing) to emergency personnel and medical personnel who might have to deal with contamination or human exposure in an emergency," Baker said.

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