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Nevadans need to say no to scourge of fracking

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Nevada's federal public lands provide spectacular opportunities for all its citizens to enjoy — from camping and driving for sightseeing to hunting and fishing. They are unique landscapes, part of what makes Nevada special.

But as in Third-World nations, there are always individuals and corporations out looking to enrich themselves at the expense of local people and the places they love. Examining the record from areas where fracking is currently taking place reveals numerous cases of contaminated wells, livestock deaths and air pollution; social justice issues such as increased violence, rape and sexual predation; industrialization of rural communities; and thousands of cases of public health issues ranging from rashes to death. Are a few jobs and tax revenue worth the cost?

Nevada is now facing such a threat from big oil and gas companies that wish to expand fracking technology to the state, having already caused significant air and water pollution problems in places such as North Dakota and Pennsylvania. The battle to protect Nevada has begun.

Fracking — currently largely unregulated and unmonitored by state officials — is being proposed for use on hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands in central Nevada overseen by the Bureau of Land Management.

This is not your father's vertical drilling. Fracking often entails drilling wells with many horizontal lateral tubes, stretching out thousands of feet from the wellhead location. Then a highly toxic mix of chemicals and sand and water are pumped into these channels under high pressure to fracture sub-surface rocks in hope of freeing oil and gas.

The industry has used “trade secret” provisions to keep the public in the dark about many chemicals used in fracking, but we do know that many of these substances can cause cancer, hormone disruption and breathing problems.

Fracking pollution threatens our water through leaks, spills, well failures and underground migration of fracking fluid. Methane (natural gas) especially threatens the atmosphere because uncombusted methane is rated perhaps 50 times as potent as CO₂ in global warming. And methane contamination caused by fracking in Parker County, Texas, has dangerously polluted water wells.

A recent Government Accountability Office report found serious shortcomings in the BLM's oversight of the oil and gas industry, with four in 10 new wells identified as higher pollution risks escaping federal inspection.

Even our pristine air is not safe. Southern California air officials have collected data showing that fracking and other dangerous techniques employ more than 40 air toxic chemicals, including hydrofluoric acid and formaldehyde, which can cause severe health problems. A Colorado School of Public Health study found that fracking-related air pollution contributes to asthma and cancer risk.

In addition, the fracking process can use millions of gallons of water per well. Here in the driest state in the union, our scarce water is better used for maintaining rural families and our natural heritage. Water contaminated by fracking cannot be uncontaminated and is lost forever.

A recent opinion piece in the Review-Journal from an oil and gas lobbyist claimed Nevada was being denied the right to join the energy boom. The real issue is whether Nevadans will allow their state and their health to be sold out from under them for the sake of corporate profits.

Nevada has numerous opportunities to create jobs, especially in clean renewable energy industries that will

add to long-term jobs and a healthy environment. Why not develop Nevada's clean energy resources, rather than bringing unneeded risks to our lands, water, and air?