

Gas executive's claims don't stand up to scrutiny

Editor:

The recent letter to the editor by J. Greg Schnacke is an example of what he does best — blows smoke. Let's look at his statements.

"Not leasing the Roan will hurt Colorado consumers." Since virtually all this gas goes into interstate pipelines bound for the east, I wonder how?

A one-year delay in the leasing will not deprive Colorado, its schools and local government of this money forever. The money is to fund social impacts from development. Without development there are no impacts for one year, so this is a wash. Also, Mr. Schnacke never provides the data upon which his claims about bonus payments, royalties and production taxes are based.

The new Department of Natural Resources' proposed plan of development for the Roan has some interesting escape clauses. It allows the industry to drill anywhere to determine where the sweet spots are and to develop them first, i.e., to high-grade the resource. This clause has no restrictions on it for surface spacing.

"Surface disturbance is limited to one percent of the total area," Schnacke wrote. This is annually, not totally. As land is reclaimed, it is subtracted off the 1 percent. There are no specific standards for when reclamation is achieved. "Looks good to me," is the deciding criteria.

He also said that after natural gas is extracted, the surface can be restored. Historically this means a little grass will be seeded and called good. No forbs or shrubs will be seeded because this will make it harder to control the noxious weeds that rapidly invade areas with large surface disturbances. Roads will be left in place to "benefit transportation." Based on history, they won't come close to restoring the surface.

The Colorado Mule Deer Association and Colorado Wildlife Federation guidelines on drilling ask for a study on how long plugged wells remain watertight. This currently is not on anyone's discussion list. But when the cement eventually turns to sand, which it will, and leaves an open well bore, the effect on all our aquifers could be substantial.

BOB ELDERKIN

Silt