

EPA to study effects of fracking

Written by

BOBBY MAGILL

BobbyMagill@coloradoan.com

12:22 AM, Mar. 13, 2011|

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency might use oil and gas development tapping the Niobrara shale formation near Cheyenne, Wyo., as a case study in an investigation of the overall environmental and public health impacts of hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking."

Fracking is a technique used by energy companies to fracture underground rock formations, releasing oil and gas. The technique usually requires an often-proprietary cocktail of water, sand and chemicals that many fear could threaten public health and contaminate groundwater and domestic water wells.

Responding to public outcry about the risks to drinking water fracking might pose, Congress directed the EPA to conduct a study about how fracking affects drinking water. The EPA's findings are expected to be made public by the end of 2012, with a more detailed report following in 2014.

The EPA's study plan includes an 11-page list of chemicals the agency has found in fracking fluid, including gelling agents, surfactants, biocides, corrosion inhibitors,

lubricators, viscosifiers and the fracturing fluid trimethylbenzene, among others.

The Niobrara oil play straddles the state line and stretches from northern Weld, Logan and Larimer counties in Colorado to as far north as Torrington, Wyo.

"Substantially, all of the wells that have been drilled and completed (in the Niobrara) have been fracked," said David Neslin, director of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, or COGCC.

The EPA will look closely at the mechanics of Niobrara shale fracking in Laramie County, Wyo., which borders Weld County, and study water quality changes with time.

The agency also will look at how fracking has impacted water quality in Western Colorado's Piceance and San Juan basins.

"We've spoken to EPA about their study," Neslin said. "We've offered to share all of our data and work with them."

Advertisement

Fast, convenient, AND affordable

Save on select Wireless* All-in-Ones, Photo Printers and Lasers

Save Today

Limited time offers

Shop Now >

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

coloradoan.com
Your Source for Local News.

But as the EPA questions fracking's impact to water quality, Wyoming officials said they have yet to find any evidence of harm.

A Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality question-and-answer document about fracking in the Niobrara shale is available on the agency's website and said fracking, if done correctly, should not contaminate domestic water wells.

"While no one can guarantee that an accident or equipment failure will not occur, the Niobrara shale play is an extremely high profile development, and both the industry and regulatory agencies are watching the development carefully to ensure environmental protection requirements are being met," the document said.

In Colorado, the COGCC is beginning a water-testing program in the Niobrara play that will allow the state to monitor changes in water quality as the oil boom continues.

The COGCC is working with energy companies to collect water well samples, but so far no "statistically significant" water quality fluctuations have been seen, Neslin said.

The Niobrara oil boom, which began in northern Weld County in 2009, is expected to continue to spread throughout the region on both sides of the state line.

Six Niobrara drilling permits are pending for northern Larimer County.

"Obviously, we've got a couple of companies that have an acreage position in Larimer County, and they'll want to test that," COGCC permitting manager Thom Kerr said. "The Niobrara is a fairly extensive area at this point. They're going to try to figure out the boundaries of it. "

That means a great deal of fracking in the region, worrying at least one environmental group about the potential impacts to reservoirs slated to be built in the area.

Last week, the Save the Poudre Coalition warned that Niobrara fracking at the proposed Galeton Reservoir east of Greeley, part of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, eventually could contaminate water in the reservoir if it ever is built.

The group is asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is writing an environmental impact statement on NISP, to study the affect of eight fracked oil and gas wells operating on the Galeton Reservoir site.

Advertisement

Fast, convenient,
AND affordable

Save on select
Wireless*
All-in-Ones,
Photo Printers
and Lasers

Save Today

Limited time offers

Shop Now >

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



Northern Water spokesman Brian Werner said officials at the agency, which will operate NISP, have no concerns about oil and gas development at the Galeton Reservoir site because the fracking occurred thousands of feet below the ground - too deep to affect the reservoir.

Advertisement

Fast, convenient,
AND affordable

Save on select
Wireless*
All-in-Ones,
Photo Printers
and Lasers

Save Today

Shop Now >

Limited time offers

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

