

ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT TODAY – FOR TOMORROW

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## **Report Unveils Plan to Protect Wyoming Groundwater During Oil & Gas Development**

(Sheridan, WY) The Powder River Basin Resource Council (“Resource Council”) released a report today recommending that Wyoming implement seven specific actions to protect scarce and dwindling groundwater resources during the unfolding boom in unconventional oil and gas development.

The report, *A Seven Point Plan to Protect Groundwater: Unconventional Oil & Gas Development Requires Wyoming State Action*, highlights the fact that many Wyoming groundwater aquifers are already being drained faster than they are recharged and more demands are being placed on aquifers for billions of gallons of water to drill and hydraulically fracture (“frack”) thousands of new horizontal oil and gas wells. The report recommends actions to better manage this water, and also recommends specific actions to protect aquifers from contamination that can occur through the disposal of fracking flowback water and produced water from oil and gas wells. Finally the report recommends that Wyoming prioritize developing recycling methods and facilities for flowback and production water in order to limit demands on freshwater sources.

“This analysis makes it clear that Wyoming must embark on a proactive and thorough program to bring our water management systems up to date. We need to apply existing statutes to guard, conserve and recycle our groundwater from cradle to grave,” said Bob LeResche, one of the report authors and Vice-Chair of the Resource Council. “We should invest in analysis, regulation and perhaps infrastructure that will allow the energy industry to take advantage of profitable new production techniques but also

minimize conflicts with Wyoming's continued need for careful stewardship of our scarce groundwater."

***The report recommends that Wyoming take the following seven actions:***

- 1. A comprehensive groundwater inventory program should be conducted by the State Engineer, in partnership with the University of Wyoming and the Wyoming Geological Survey in areas of Wyoming most likely to be attractive to new energy production techniques. This analysis should include estimation of the water resources needed for oil and gas production, how extraction of these resources will impact groundwater aquifers and where those water resources will come from. The analysis should include projections for future water demands and aquifer recharge rates and available water to meet those demands. In other words, a water budget should be established for each major aquifer.*
- 2. Groundwater Control Areas should be established by the State Engineer in Campbell County and portions of Converse and Johnson counties where groundwater withdrawals in recent decades have outstripped the pace of recharge. Water supply and demand in other areas of the state should be carefully analyzed to determine if the establishment of Groundwater Control Areas is also appropriate elsewhere.*
- 3. The Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission and the Department of Environmental Quality should jointly analyze data to project the volumes of fracking flowback water and produced water that will need to be disposed of in the next decade in Wyoming. They should establish as soon as practicable a system to track and account for each truckload of flowback and produced water, to ensure safe and legal disposal methods are used and to track and verify the actual volumes of water involved. More on-the-ground inspectors should be hired to curb spills and illegal dumping of contaminated water and to ensure the new accurate tracking and record-keeping system is properly employed.*
- 4. The Governor should appoint a statewide task force to investigate the current condition of all Class 2 injection wells. The task force should project the number and capacity of injection wells that will be required over the next decade and plan for their development and monitoring. The task force should develop a plan for clean up of contaminated aquifers and land and should arrange for that plan to be followed to clean up and close any Class 2 injection wells with historic and ongoing violations.*
- 5. A Wyoming well plugging program should be developed that: 1) includes public outreach efforts to landowners and industry to help identify unplugged wells; 2) implements an inspection program to prioritize and address unplugged bore holes, oil and gas and uranium wells; and 3) establishes a fund to help plug these wells in an accelerated fashion with active drilling areas prioritized.*

*6. The Governor should appoint a statewide task force to investigate the current condition of commercial oil field waste disposal facilities in the state. A plan for clean up of contamination of aquifers and land should be established and followed and facilities with historic and ongoing violations should be closed.*

*7. The University of Wyoming School of Energy Resources should collaborate with the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, the Department of Environmental Quality and where appropriate, the Wyoming Water Development Commission to provide analysis and assistance to the energy industry to encourage recycling facilities and reuse of flowback and production water to the maximum extent feasible for oil and gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing.*

The Powder River Basin Resource Council is a citizen-based organization of individuals and affiliate groups dedicated to the stewardship of Wyoming's natural resources. The report is attached and can also be found at

<http://www.powderriverbasin.org/other-publications/>