

Earthworks' Oil & Gas Accountability Project
National People's Oil & Gas Summit
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
November 19, 2010

OPENING REMARKS:

**By Gwen Lachelt, Director
Earthworks' OGAP**

I'd like to extend a huge thank-you to each of you for being here, for taking the time to mark where we are in this people's oil and gas movement and determine where we go from here. And I offer a huge thank-you to the Summit co-sponsors and Steering Committee for helping to shape the agenda and recruiting speakers and participants. I'd also like to extend a huge thank-you in advance to all the panelists and keynotes for all the work you have put into your presentations and the critical work that you do. And, to Summit organizer Lisa Sumi, you embody the phrase, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing really, really well." Thank you for grabbing this great big bull by the horns and making this happen.

This is our 7th summit and our first one in the eastern United States. I've loved every one of our gatherings but I've been especially excited about this summit because to me it marks the coming together of the leaders of this movement from across the country and Canada to name our problems and define how we're going to move forward together in the face of energy challenges. This is a gathering of people who live with oil and gas wells in their backyards, their ranches, their communities, and their cities and have worked tirelessly to reform oil and gas practices. And this is a gathering of people who see what has happened in America's oil and gas producing regions and are doing all they can to stop these impacts from happening in their own backyards.

I've lived for 30 years in Durango, Colorado, on top of the San Juan Basin. On a beautiful clear and cold Sunday morning in January 1988, I opened my *Durango Herald* to learn that Amoco, now BP, planned to drill 1,000 coalbed methane wells on the Colorado side of the San Juan Basin. I was a new community organizer at the time working for the Western Colorado Congress and San Juan Citizens Alliance and we had just chalked up our first big victory of getting a stoplight at a dangerous intersection. We were *definitely* ready to take on the oil and gas industry next!

Before we knew what was happening, drilling rigs were popping up everywhere in our county. My phone started ringing and it hasn't stopped since. One of those first calls was from Jim and Terry Fitzgerald, who told me "We've got to do something and we've got to protect our water." Twenty-two years later, we're still working to protect our water. It was trial by fire learning about oil and gas development: leasing, mineral rights, surface rights, split-estate, cathodic protection wells, injection wells, production pits, evaporation pits, thermogenic gas, biogenic gas, drilling, hydraulic fracturing, and on and on. Especially interesting was learning that the word "conservation" in the oil and gas vernacular means not wasting the resource by leaving it in the ground. It was a steep learning curve.

Here are some examples of those early phone calls we received after Amoco's announcement:

"The landman just knocked on my door and told me I had to sign this agreement to drill a well right away. He told me I had to sign because it's in the national interest to get this gas out and besides, he said, I had no rights any way because mineral rights are more important than surface rights. What's a split-estate anyway?"

"They just drilled two wells near my house and my water well went dry. The company told me their drilling had nothing to do with it. They laughed and told me to go ahead and sue. I can't afford a lawyer."

“They’re drilling a well next to my house. We can’t sleep. We can’t even hear each other talk at the dinner table. At night, the lights are so bright it’s like daytime. The company told me to go stay in a hotel. I can’t afford a hotel. Why is it legal to drill a well so close to my home?”

“They drilled a well next to my house. My water blasts out of the faucet now and it smells. We can light our tap water on fire. Is our house safe? What should we do?”

“They’re doing something to the well near my house. My house is shaking and my water turned black. They said they’re ‘fracking’ the well. What are they putting down that well?”

“They’re out there with a bulldozer covering up that pit next to the well. Can they do that? They even buried the plastic liner. What’s in that pit?”

“The company is flaring the well next to my house and I broke out in a rash. What’s being flared? Isn’t it just natural gas?”

Many new wells are disrupting lives all over again, all across the country. Many people are concerned with the legacy issues or the long-term impacts to water and soil and public health. Many people worry about the tens of thousands of production pits that have been bulldozed with all sorts of toxic drilling muds and fracturing fluids. Many others fear what doesn’t meet the eye—the long-term impacts of injecting toxic fracturing fluids and diesel fuel into the earth to get the gas out; or the long-term impacts of both using enormous amounts of water to drill and pulling out enormous amounts of water in order to produce the gas; or the short and long-term impacts of disposing of enormous amounts of salt water into deep injection wells.

Today, the calls continue to flood in from every oil and gas producing state and beyond: British Columbia, Alberta, Australia, Ghana. People who live with oil and gas call to report that they have cancer or lupus or asthma or that a child was born with a disability. They want to know if oil and gas is to blame.

Back in the day, we used every trick in the book to block drilling, stop drilling, slow drilling, regulate drilling and we’ve fought to put new laws and regulations on the books where they didn’t exist before. We’ve blocked bulldozers, filed restraining orders, filed lawsuits, received death threats and been put on trial. Winston Churchill said, “If you’re going through hell, keep going.” He also said, “Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.” I think we’ve got *that* one down, especially since the theme of our first summit in February of 2000 was to debunk the industry-perpetuated myth that natural gas is clean energy—which we know today to not be true.

So 11 years ago, we started EARTHWORKS’ Oil & Gas Accountability Project with several people in this room: Wilma Subra, Dan Randolph, Jack Scott, Jill Morrison, Jim and Terry Fitzgerald, Gloria Flora, Dan Heilig, Karin Sheldon, and other folks across the country. We set out to work with communities to prevent and reduce the impacts caused by oil and gas development.

On a practical level, the OGAP community can rattle off a number of successes over the years, ranging from the new Pittsburgh ordinance banning gas development within city limits, to local and state governments across the country passing precedent-setting regulations, to Wyoming adopting the country’s strongest rule requiring disclosure of the chemicals used in fracturing operations. Other states are responding by requiring pitless drilling and we’ve passed new laws protecting landowner rights. U.S. Senators and Representatives like Bob Casey from Pennsylvania, Diana DeGette from Colorado, and Maurice Hinchey from New York have responded by introducing the Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act, the FRAC Act.

Has any of it done any good? I hope so. We’ve protected places like the Valle Vidal in New Mexico and the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana. Thanks to the work of groups like Drilling Santa Fe and New Mexico Environmental Law Center, if drilling proceeds in Santa Fe County, it will proceed with the most protections

possible manner. We just heard from Pittsburgh City Councilman Doug Shields today about the work that Pittsburgh has done to ban drilling and advance the rights of municipalities.

Some companies are responding with best practices like flareless drilling to reduce emissions and directional drilling of multiple wells from one pad to reduce surface impacts and habitat fragmentation.

There are many other examples of steps forward—but these reforms simply aren't enough for those living every day with the impacts of oil and gas development and those seeing drilling marching all too fast to their communities and public lands.

Are we getting anywhere? Good question. Is it a fight worth fighting? Absolutely. I don't believe we have a choice. We've tapped the most accessible reserves of oil and gas and now companies are developing technologies to get to reserves previously thought to be impossible to reach. Because of the trend away from coal-fired power over the past 20 years, natural gas has become our second most important energy source after oil.

To OGAP, the question we all need to ask isn't just about whether to drill or where to drill or how to drill. It's about how we face the reality of our energy consumption and how we change our relationship to energy; how we respect individuals and communities; and how we respect our air and our water and public lands for generations to come.

In closing, I have a couple of challenges I'd like to issue for this Summit. The first challenge is help us identify the theme of this gathering. When we first met with Jim Fitzgerald about the Summit he asked us, "What's the theme?" And I said, "Well, it's the *National* People's Oil & Gas Summit." I may not be the cleverest person in the room but since it's the first *National* People's Oil & Gas Summit, I'd thought it would be just fine to call it the *National* People's Oil & Gas Summit. Jim didn't buy that—partly since the theme of our last Summit in 2005 was Toxics in Our Communities to begin exposing the public health impacts of drilling and launching the campaign to repeal the exemption of hydraulic fracturing from the U.S. Safe Drinking Water Act.

We've held summits in Denver, Colorado, Farmington, New Mexico, and Wasilla, Alaska. Yes, Wasilla, Alaska. In the aftermath of the 2003 Alaska summit, over 300,000 acres leased for coalbed methane drilling were returned to the state, which also banned the use of diesel in fracturing fluids in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, and the Mat-Su Borough adopted oil and gas regulations. All of that, right in Sarah Palin's backyard. She might be able to see Russia from her house but she can't see a gas well. *Drill, Baby, Drill.*

So, help us define the theme of this Summit. I propose to you, in the Wild West vernacular, that we circle the wagons and create a big tent. We must remember that even if we take on different parts of the fight and use different strategies, we all ultimately want and are working for the same thing: protection of people and the environment. A friend of mine always says, "*Just imagine what we could do if we turned all the bullets outward.*"

My final challenge to each of you is to picture this meeting in 20 years. The most important part of this Summit will be what happens after we leave. The reforms that have already been set in motion and the reforms that will happen after this gathering can shape and define energy policy at the local, state, and federal level—and outcomes in all of our communities—for decades to come.

Thank you.