

McKibbin's Scribbles: More people = more attention

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Whoever said there's strength in numbers was dead on.

(The author, according to online quote web sites, is really two men. Mark Shields, an American political columnist and commentator, said, "There is always strength in numbers. The more individuals or organizations that you can rally to your cause, the better." And an English actor, Mike Berry, said, "There is strength in numbers and those numbers come in pounds.")

What brought the quote to mind was a luncheon conversation I had on Saturday, at the Colorado Press Association convention in Denver. The publisher of the Longmont Times-Call, Dean Lehman, and his wife wondered if the natural gas development around Rifle included hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. The practice has become a lightning rod of sorts for environmental groups and others concerned about potential air and water pollution from fracking. And as Lehman pointed out, Longmont is being sued by the industry, after voters there passed a ban on drilling.

"Oh, sure," I replied. "But we don't have the population numbers it takes for something like that to get noticed," unlike the Front Range.

Take a look at some of what's been in the news recently since oil and gas activity moved from our neck of the woods across the mountains:

Just this past weekend, the Colorado Air Quality Control Commission adopted rules to control emissions from oil and gas facilities, including methane. Colorado is the first state in the nation to specifically target methane emissions, which is linked to climate change. They did it with the support of four energy companies but opposition from a couple of industry trade groups. Garfield County and others on the West Slope wanted less stringent regulations in this half of the state.

I recall spending most of a weekend in Denver, sitting in a hearing regarding regulations of a similar vein, about six or seven years ago. The details escape me now, but I'm pretty sure there were some similar measures, though less far reaching, approved back then. But not as much attention was given then, because it wasn't viewed as affecting the major population center of the state.

This past week, plans were announced to collect signatures to get a measure in front of Colorado voters in November that would give cities and towns more control over oil and gas drilling inside their borders. This would have never gained traction if it had begun on the West Slope when things were booming and residents around here were making the same complaints you hear now from people on the Front Range. Because the numbers weren't there. Doesn't mean the people who said their health suffered from gas development

around here were any less deserving of attention than the people now making the same claims. There are just more of them and they have a larger audience.

I often wonder what people like Laura Amos, Duke Cox, Shirley Willis, Lisa Bracken, Tara Meixsell and others who were either personally affected by gas development back in the day or who tried to change things then think now, as they read and hear what's going on now that the attention is focused where more people live.

I'm not saying any of the recent changes or potential changes will end up being the right moves. I've always thought oil and gas development is an industrial activity and there's no getting around that. But it should be done right and that hasn't always been the case.

But it looks like we could see more rules and regulations, just because there's strength in numbers.

"Just because there is strength in numbers doesn't mean that the majority is always right." – Unknown author. "There's strength in numbers. But there's weakness in a man who relies on them." – Unknown author.

"Here may be strength in numbers, but there is also an increase in stupidity." – Unknown author.

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