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EPA steps away from fracking investigation in Wyoming

EPA won't even finalize its draft report as Wyoming takes control.

by Scott K. Johnson - June 23 2013, 5:00pm EDT

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Last October, Ars published an [update](#) to a US EPA investigation linking natural gas production to groundwater contamination in Wyoming. On Thursday, the EPA [announced](#) that it will step back from the investigation, ceding leadership to the State of Wyoming.

The [Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality](#) and the [Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission](#) will further investigate groundwater conditions around Pavillion with support from the EPA, according to the press release. The scope of the investigation will be more limited, however. It'll now focus on a select number of private wells rather than larger questions about the possibility of gas production and hydraulic fracking impacts in shallow and deep groundwater. The State plans to additionally sample fourteen water supply wells, analyze existing data on the cement seals in gas production wells within a quarter mile of those water wells, and search for records of previous wastewater pits used to hold fracking fluid in that area. The results are scheduled to be finalized and released in September 2014.

Some of that work will be paid for with funds from a \$1.5 million grant that Encana, the gas exploration company operating in Pavillion, is giving to the [Wyoming Natural Resource Foundation](#).

Wyoming Governor Matt Mead's statement in the EPA press release reads, "It is in everyone's best interest—particularly the citizens who live outside of Pavillion—that Wyoming and the EPA reach an unbiased, scientifically supportable conclusion. I commend the EPA and Encana for working with me to chart a positive course for this investigation. I commit that Wyoming will work in a thoughtful and productive manner as further investigation is initiated."

The move allows Wyoming, whose collaboration with the EPA in Pavillion hasn't been entirely harmonious, the freedom to evaluate the water supply well issues as it sees fit.

The EPA also appears to be abandoning its draft reports on the investigation according to its press release. "While EPA stands behind its work and data, the agency recognizes the State of Wyoming's commitment for further investigation and efforts to provide clean water and does not plan to finalize or seek peer review of its draft Pavillion groundwater report released in December, 2011. Nor does the agency plan to rely upon the conclusions in the draft report."

Wyoming will, however, utilize the data collected by the EPA up to this point for its final report.

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