



Wild Lands Advocate 12(5): 16 - 17, October 2004

Encana's "Ruthless Plans" for Prairies Raise Protests from Residents

The following letter was sent to the Chairman of the Alberta Energy and Utility Board, September 21, 2004.

Dear Chairman:

I am a citizen of East Coulee, Alberta. I am writing you to voice my concerns about EnCana Oil and Gas Partnership's developments in south/central Alberta. While I am concerned that the level of development that is occurring already is rapidly turning my neighbouring world into an industrial landscape incompatible with other land uses, I am especially alarmed at their ruthless plans for future developments, in particular their plans/proposals to

- suspend drilling spacing units;
- apply for four gas wells or more per section;
- request for inter-well distance to be reduced;
- request for minimum distance from a producing well to the boundary of the holding area to be 300 m;
- exponentially increase their initial "CBM"¹ (coal-bed methane) development proposal of only 700 wells in total, to one now involving thousands of proposed wells OVER AND ABOVE their existing and future natural gas developments; and
- proceed without an accurate and comprehensive Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) for the entire proposed CBM development, including socio-economic factors, safety, small town by-pass for oil and gas vehicles, sensitive habitat protection, road damage and repair, etc.

These are not concerns that go away when they are typically divided up into more palatable, piecemeal, project-by-project, lease-by-lease, county-by-county chunks. The ecotype (Great Plains) that these developments are occurring on is the most endangered on the continent. It is outrageous to allow a corporation with a history of insensitivity to social² and environmental³ concerns like this one to proceed with such massive and ruthless projects without first conducting a full Cumulative Effects Assessment for their cumulative developments (past, present, and proposed) for the entire Great Plains landbase to which they hold tenure, in which they address

- negative impacts to native grassland (very little native grass remains – we need to protect what is left);
- negative cultural impacts (already occurring);
- negative socio-economic impacts;
- negative impacts to historical values;
- negative noise impacts (already occurring);
- negative visual impacts (already occurring);
- negative wildlife habitat impacts (already occurring);
- negative impacts to wildlife (already occurring);
- negative air quality impacts;
- negative road impacts (already occurring);
- negative impacts to health, safety and well being (already occurring);





- negative impacts to watershed/riparian zones (e.g., how much unrecoverable water will EnCana need to take from already beleaguered rivers like the Red Deer?);
- negative impacts to water wells (has EnCana/the EUB truly addressed all possible methane gas escape from CBM/NGC activity and into our water, water quantity and quality?);
- flares often blowing out in the wind, resulting in unburned gas being released;
- etc.

EnCana is, in my experience, a corporation that requires constant monitoring, not only in light of its history (AEC) of social and environmental irresponsibility, but due to its very size. If we as a people are to allow corporations of this magnitude to exist, then we must be prepared for the negative repercussions. What are the social consequences of allowing a single “person” to so dominate a landscape?

Feeding a beast of this size is going to have tremendous impacts. When this bull-in-the-china shop moves on the landscape, things are going to be broken (sometimes irreparably), and all kinds of feet are going to be stepped on. All kinds of feet are being stepped on. Herein lies the rub. How do we get this corporation to quit stepping all over our feet, to plan for socially responsible developments on an order of magnitude that are guaranteed to enhance our quality of life on a scale that outweighs the erosion that is mounting?

It is EnCana’s responsibility to solve this problem, not ours. They can start with a full (not piecemeal, project-by-project) a priori CEA for the Alberta plains. They will then likely need to proceed by curbing their appetite for development. Federal regulation of all activities of a corporation of this size may be indicated.

Let them make their billions if they must, but keep them off our feet. Make them understand that it is their responsibility to act responsibly (not just say they will), and to determine ahead of time what “responsible” means to the people whose lives they are affecting.

Thank-you.

Jonathan Wright

¹Now being called in some applications “NGC” – natural gas from coal – in a likely attempt at subterfuge given the negative realities recognized as stemming from CBM.

²Parent company AEC has demonstrated a callous – and famous – disregard for concerns about gas-well flaring. Such disregard for social concerns can lead, and has led, to the creation of “radical” type individuals/protestors.

³I have personally witnessed and documented the environmental degradation caused by EnCana’s activities on the native grasslands of one of our most celebrated National Wildlife Areas, as well as the damages their activities have done to populations of listed species – damages for which they did not attempt to atone until they were publicly revealed. A full CEA in this case might have avoided such erosion of our nation’s interests.

(A handful of Rosebud-area residents also wrote letters of protest to the AEUB prior to this letter by Jonathan. One Rosebud area resident wrote many letters of protest. Rosebud-area people voiced concerns in an emergency meeting wherein EnCana tried unsuccessfully to remedy recent inappropriate consultations in the area.)

Subsequent to this letter, forwarded to EnCana by the Wheatland Surface Rights Group, and the joining of a number of communities in protest – verbal and written – one of EnCana’s vice presidents said that EnCana now wants to openly consult with Wheatland County communities about long-range plans. Time will tell whether residents are satisfied with how the company is making reparation and changing the way they operate. Individuals, especially with communities working together, can make a big difference.





EnCana's first upfront, long-range planning for development in the County of Wheatland will be presented at an open house in the Rosebud Community Hall October 21, 2004.)

