

Permaculture in Practice

Oil and gas deal could come up as aces

Thanks to an outdated mining law, although New Mexico landowners typically own the surface of their real property, corporations often hold leases to the land's subsurface resources. Unless you've been living in an abandoned mineshaft, you know that Tecton Energy, a Houston-based firm, is laying claim to the oil and gas under a wide swath of Santa Fe County.

Tecton's ace in the hole in the current political poker game is the aforementioned 1872 federal mining law. Its king in the hole is our society's exceedingly voracious appetite for energy. Its queen, a queen of diamonds, is that money talks and Tecton has serious backing from a New York investment bank. Although the deck seems stacked against *la gente*, there are many more cards to be played before this deal goes down.

The tragedy, of course, is that this is a gamble that we didn't have to enter into. Back in the 1970s, we could have responded enthusiastically to the simple supplication of the boy on the beach in that "Don't Be Fuelish" ad campaign. We could have had much more compassion, motivation, and forethought when we watched that celebrated teardrop slide down the cheek of that Indian standing next to a busy, garbage-strewn freeway. Unfortunately, television images of distant problems rarely move the masses. (For recent proof, one only has to look at the images of chaos in Iraq that we've watched for the last five years with little protest.)

Overflow crowds at public meetings like the ones at the Genoveva Chavez Community Center and Eldorado Elementary School; the barrage of e-mails, letters, and phone calls that county commissioners and other government officials are receiving; all of the thoughtful official public comment; and the plethora of letters to editors on the drilling issue are all good signs that Santa Fe is willing to play its ace in the hole early and often. Our ace is that the prospect of oil and gas drilling in the Galisteo Basin is this community's biggest not-in-my-backyard issue in recent memory. Here are three ways to see that the cards we play in January are aces, too.



According to www.santafenotoil.org, you are invited to a peaceful candlelight march on Friday, Jan. 11. The vigil starts at the U.S. Courthouse (at Washington and Federal Place) at 5:30 p.m. The group will then proceed to the Plaza. Based on a growing number of health concerns related to Tecton's intended "hydraulic fracturing" procedure, organizer Jerry Held, M.D., has obtained a permit for the event. He suggests bringing flashlights, candles, friends, and family.

A second way to ensure that the next card we play, as a community, is another ace is to participate in the next round of public comment on the issue. When the county's newest version of a drilling ordinance is presented at a public hearing on Jan. 7, you will have 16 days to submit public comment on the revised draft. A third way is to voice your concerns at a critical public hearing scheduled for Jan. 29 in the county commission chambers at 102 Grant Avenue.

We *can* force Tecton to fold its cards and go home, or we can sit back and watch our property values take a major dive. It's your call.

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