



## Oil & Gas Symposium

On January 19, a cold, snowy day in Great Falls, more than 125 people gathered from across Montana, and the Rocky Mountain West to listen to and exchange ideas with 18 panelists that spoke at the MWF symposium, Our Changing Landscape, Oil and Gas Developments: Impacts to Hunting and Fishing.

Opening the Symposium for MWF was Governor Brian Schweitzer, who spoke about the importance of public access and maintaining huntable populations of game through science based management. The Governor lauded efforts by MWF to bring hunters and anglers together to talk about the impacts that oil and gas development could have on Montana wildlife populations and hunting. "Don't let divisive forces bring you down," the Governor said while speaking on the need for hunters and anglers to work together on energy development. He strongly urged hunters and anglers to work with diverse interests, to form broad based coalitions to ensure that Montana's hunting and angling heritage becomes a major factor with federal land managers oil and gas development decisions.

The need and urgency for hunters and anglers to become more engaged with the many issues and to maintain unity on developing comprehensive strategies for oil and gas development was repeatedly brought home by hunters and anglers from Colorado, Wyoming and Louisiana; states that have experienced the impacts. Walt Gasson, the executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation spoke passionately about making sure the "home place" was still around for his grandson. He also spoke of the early days of the oil and gas boom in Wyoming and trying to get hunters and anglers more involved "We're not talking about laying down in front of the Bulldozer," he went on to say that "If we did that in Wyoming, you'd be two-dimensional pretty fast." He talked about the working people and the need to engage with groups that as hunters or anglers, we don't always agree with. Dennis Buechler, a Colorado Division of Wildlife Commissioner spoke of their recent legislation that reformed the board of oil and gas, and put wildlife and sporting concerns on a level playing field – on the board. In Colorado, environmental groups, sportsmen's groups, outfitters, ranchers and local communities came together in an effort to make sure that oil and gas development happened in a responsible manner. Together, that coalition passed landmark legislation that does just that, protects Colorado's wildlife and hunting heritage.

Conrad "Duke" Williams, of Houma Louisiana also spoke of making sure Montana did not "fall behind the power curve" when it came to demanding equal treatment from policy makers – state and federal – and the energy companies. Williams spoke of how Louisiana has suffered from lax environmental laws, attitudes from industry that would rather pay a small fine than comply with regulations, and the loss of wildlife habitat and loss of opportunity for hunting and fishing.

Williams final words to Montanan's was "don't let what happened in Louisiana happen to Montana. You have too much to loose for those kind of short term gains."

MWF organized the symposium to bring together private landowners, hunters, anglers, agencies, wildlife interests and industry representatives to talk about difficult issues and options. Montanans wanted to hear from hunters, anglers and agencies in states that have more experience with development than Montana. Panelists also included the most up-to-date researchers on development impacts to sage grouse, mule deer, pronghorn, and water quality.

The symposium ended with a panel facilitated by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission chair, Steve Doherty titled 'Where Do We Go From Here?'

Helen Waller, a landowner from Circle, MT, spoke of local solutions to the energy crisis through biodiesel, renewable energy such as wind and solar, and localizing power supplies in general. Justice of the Peace Greg Mohr from Sydney, who is a landowner, sportsman and community leader, talked about his past as a roughneck in the oil fields some 30 years ago, the price that wildlife paid and how he would like to never see that again. Montana Petroleum Association, Executive Director, David Galt spoke of how there needs to be common ground between sportsmen and industry about where development is appropriate, and where it should be off limits.

The final panel was followed by an open microphone session where a representative of the County Commissioners from Fallon County rose and spoke eloquently about how he now understands what the concerns are of hunters and anglers. He thanked MWF and vowed to carry our message for responsible development back to Fallon County.

MWF has never been against oil and gas development –in general terms – instead we are working to ensure that it occurs in a responsible manner and only in appropriate locations that don't result in long-term negative impacts to our wildlife, hunting and angling legacy. Wildlife and hunting generate significant contributions to the states economy but they are more; our diverse populations of wildlife and our hunting and fishing opportunities are core to the Montana quality of life. Public land management agencies must live up to their charge of managing our lands for the public interests, not just those that will be gone in 10 years and leave the public holding the bag with fragmented habitats, less game, and waste products that devastate wildlife populations. Montana has experienced the benefits and the costs of developing it's natural resources in an irresponsible manner before. What we need now, where we need to go from here is toward more collaborative, comprehensive planning that protects crucial habitats into the future...

*The symposium was co-sponsored by National Wildlife Federation and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.*