

No Drops Left

Big Horn Leasing LLC is on the cusp of being granted 75 million gallons of potable water per year for fracking, in perpetuity, by our government. Their application for shallow, potable water will affect 1,367 active groundwater rights in Richland County. This is the precious water that families, livestock and wild animals rely upon. According to Big Horn's Preliminary Determination to Grant, "This use is considered 100% consumptive as water is not expected to return to the source (pg. 20)."

Big Horn Leasing LLC wants to take water from the Highway 200 arid plateau aquifer, which is replenished by rainwater. This is pure, clean water that can be consumed directly from the well. According to our hydrogeologist, Big Horn's application has several issues:

- (1) The application represents our aquifer as if it were homogenous - like a large, continuous pool. It is not. This aquifer is more like an ant farm, with individual streams and columns made of sandstone and clay.
- (2) The application claims that the Yellowstone River supplies water to the aquifer. This is false. The Highway 200 aquifer is significantly higher than the river; water does not flow uphill.
- (3) During the applicant's testing, drawdown began to increase rather than stabilize. Big Horn requested a variance, which the Glasgow DNRC director approved.
- (4) During testing, no monitoring of nearby wells took place.
- (5) The potential impact on surface waters was not adequately addressed.

So, I called the Glasgow Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) for an appointment.

During our meeting on February 7, 2025, I asked the Glasgow DNRC Director, Lih-an Yang, the following questions:

"If I put a pipe on my land, could I also apply for 229 Acre Feet (approximately 75 million gallons) per year and expect to be granted a permit using the same hydrogeological data as Big Horn Leasing?"

Yang said, "Yes."

"What about two or three of my neighbors along Highway 200?" I asked. "Could they also get 229 AF per year?"

Yang said “Yes.”

“So,” I asked, “When would the DNRC stop permitting water rights for fracking?”

Yang’s answer:

“When there isn’t one drop left.”

The problem is this: should potable, clean water be permitted for fracking, a Gold Rush mentality will develop toward our aquifers that rely on rainwater for renewal.

Should a homeowner experience poor water quality or drawdown to their well, he or she would need to purchase water from another source. If the residents of Sidney were to purchase 75 million gallons of water a year from the DRWA, it would cost \$353,113.42 annually.

While the Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority (DRWA)’s website claims that this area’s aquifer is shallow and limited, the application claims that the Highway 200 aquifer is a large pool that can support a 75 million gallon drawdown yearly, in perpetuity.

Big Horn’s application is scheduled to be approved on February 24, 2025. It is time to take action to preserve the best water in the county, for families, farms, flora and fauna. Call your representatives and let them know that our natural, potable water should be protected. We want some drops left.

Dani-John Bennion

Founder of Montana Clean Water