

Transcript Units 1 & 2 Site Characterization Report Public Meeting  
July 15, 2013  
Colstrip City Hall  
Colstrip, Montana

DEQ staff attending: Jake Kandelin, Ed Hayes

Speaker #1: Nick Golder

I'm Nick Golder. I read through the literature there. It talks about various constituents in leaking ponds and so forth. But there's no .. I kind of wondering .... There seems to be no information about a plume down below these ponds of how far it's going or how fast it's moving, if it's growing or receding. To me that's a primary thing to consider what is what is escaping and what is in the plume.

Speaker #2: Brad Sauer.

I'm co-chair of the Rosebud Protection Association. Just want to state that we are affiliated with the Northern Plains Council. We have had issues with these ponds and their initial construction and their current state starting in 1976. And I have a summary sheet here I drafted form right now, but I'll be happy to provide that summary when we complete our draft in the form of comments. It goes back to when the Board of Natural Resources issued the Major Facilities and Siting Act. That was before there was a DEQ. So there is some history here. I'll be brief beyond that. There has been a lot of problems with these ponds. And I know that PPL is starting to do a good job, I hope, in lining ponds. I'd like to see them continue that.

But as far as the report goes, I noticed a couple things. And one is ...and I may have missed it in the reading, it was hard to stay awake in reading it. But it does not refer necessarily to pre-pond conditions. In other works, it seems to lack some baseline. It seem like if you want to achieve success at something, you ought to know where you started from. And again to reiterate what Nick just said, it doesn't seem to say how far that plume has moved in the underground aquifer down gradient.

Thank you.

Speaker #3: Clint McCrae

I'm Clint McCrae and I ranch on the Rosebud Creek south of Colstrip. I've testified a couple of times in this room on the subject and I think that we've been here there are new people from the DEQ. If you have heard this before, I apologize. But one of the things that we as landowners, as Brad said earlier, we have been involved in this. I was in in high school when this first raised up. We knew that there was going to be problems with these ponds. We tried to get that point across when they were construction that if and when they would leak, what would happened. And we were told that they never would leak. And here, thirty years later, here we are.

One of the concerns that I have with this so-called process is I think that is easy for PPL and the DEQ to sit down and craft these agreements. But I think that there is an entity that is lacking and that is the adjacent landowners. You are making decisions that are impacting our livelihoods and we are not even at the table and we

haven't even been invited. And I would suggest, respectively, if you would look at you own mission statement.

The second question that I have and maybe this goes to PPL, is that what we believe should have happened in the first place is that dry ash storage should have been chosen rather than wet ash storage which is done now. I think that if that had happened, we wouldn't be here. And we would like to know when that is going to happen, if it is already started, and to take a long hard look at that. Because what I've seen in that report, I didn't even see a mention of it.

Thank you.

Speaker #4: Wallace McCrae

My name is Wallace McCrae. Clint and I are both on the same ranch southeast of here. And Jake Kandelin, is that the name? I'd like to welcome you to the lion's den.

And I remember over thirty years ago, we had a hearing in Helena about the ash ponds. The landowner at that time where the ash ponds for 3 and 4 are located said, testified that if wet slurry was put in them that the ash ponds would leak.

The attorney, Mr. Bellingham, for Montana Power and the associated other utilities cross-examined this landowner and said to him "Are you a hydrologist?" He said no.

Attorney: Are you a soil scientist?

Landowner: He said no.

Attorney: Are you a geologist?

Landowner: He said no.

Attorney: But you claim that the land there on Cow Creek won't hold water.

Landowner: That's right.

Attorney: What do you base this on?

Landowner: We've put a reservoir in there and it doesn't hold water. It leaks like a sieve. It hardly slows the flood down.

Attorney: But the applicants have hired all sorts of kinds of experts with doctor's degrees and you have no official capacity to make this judgment and they would all dispute what you had to say.

I think that it was the Board of Health that initially approved the plant and granted the permit, am I wrong?

Response by Ed Hayes: "I believe that is correct."

The head of the Board of Health was an environmental educator from Eastern Montana College at that time, Dr. Will Clark. And I asked Dr. Clark "What if the ash ponds leak?" He responded "We are going to put a condition that the ash ponds will be completely sealed." That was put in, Condition 12 D, was put in the permit. They did leak just like the landowner said they would.

And for over thirty years, we have been talking about a process and that plume is spreading is spreading more and more and more. We have never been able to get a quote from the

Department on how much of the 3 and 4 ash ponds and all of the associated ash ponds, how many gallons per minute are escaping.

Our ranching operation and lots more in this community in this part of the country are dependent on two things, clean water and quantity of water. One of those two things is being interrupted and I think PPL has proven it by fencing off spontaneous water that is showing up and not from runoff, not from rain, not from original aquifers. PPL is fencing those off and they are also buying land because the water on that land has been so contaminated. What you are doing is not working. How long do we have to sit and wait for something to work? Because I'll tell you what will happened. Nothing is going to be done. The state is not going to solve the problem. PPL and their associates are not going to solve the problem. It's going to be another Butte, a Superfund site. And people come and go. And I'd like to see you people have success before you go down the road. Because we sure as hell haven't had one yet.

Speaker 5: Derf Johnson

Good evening. My name is Derf Johnson and I'm here with the Montana Environmental Information Center. And we actually had the opportunity for a hydrogeologist to provide us with some preliminary feedback and we will be submitting written comments, but I just wanted to read though a few of the things that he reported back to us.

The basic gist is that this is supposed to be a Site Characterization Report, unfortunately what we have seen is that this report fails the basic task because it does not fully inform DEQ or the public

about the overall geographic extent of the plume. So we do share the McCrae's concerns. Whether it is growing and where it is heading, it doesn't report back on these things. And this information is critical to selecting an effective remedy to stop (inaudible) contamination, and the clean up the existing contamination.

Specific to the report, the evaluation of the remedial effectiveness is flawed. The effectiveness is based on conductance even though it is not a good indicator for parameters like boron, sulfate, and chloride. These parameters do not correspond to conductance levels and therefore cannot be represented by simply analyzing conductance.

It is also inappropriate to measure the effectiveness of the remedy based upon a comparison of the highest level ever measured in the well. The effectiveness of the remedy should be compared to the appropriate set of indicator parameters before the ponds were constructed, a baseline.

It is wrong to conclude that the lack of bromide below the ponds indicates that the ponds are not leaking. In fact, the 2012 groundwater analysis showed no reportable bromide in the majority of the wells. Other parameters like boron, specific conductance, and sulfate are very high in a number of wells and are better indicators of whether the ponds are leaking.

The effectiveness of the remedy should also not be based solely on capture wells. Capture wells give an incomplete and a skewed perspective of water quality because pumping at the well site changes the concentration and chemistry of extracted water. The

remedy should be evaluated based on the entire site using maps developed with data from monitoring and capture wells.

And lastly, the size of the plume has to be tackled using indicator parameters. Only focusing on capture wells gives no information regarding whether the plume is growing in size. The leading edge of the plume needs to be identified. And an effective remedy will decrease the size of the plume, but capture wells provide no information about whether or not that is occurring.

Again we are going to be submitting the more technical analysis in writing.

Thank you.

Speaker #6: Nick Golder

I guess I'd elaborate a little on the plume thing. I ranch in this area here and been here a lifetime and so any rancher knows we can't put in a reservoir because it won't hold water. The soil is porous. And so we tried to get these ponds lined in the first place when they were put in. No, no it will plug itself up and whatever anyway, we knew that it would leak and it did. And a pattern that happens with this strip mine and probably with many of them is when they open a cut to mine coal, they release a confined aquifer with water that is in storage underground. They open a spigot and so they are draining springs and wells upstream.

And the general pattern is water logging downstream below the mine. Part of this water logging here is caused from the mining with that release of extra water and part of it I think the Surge Pond out there. They put in that pond and when they first put it in

several years ago, you probably have a record of when, and I just remember them doing it. They filled it half full and I think they had a 23-inch pipeline at the time. They couldn't get it any fuller, it was leaking that fast. So they took some other measures and slowed that down.

But I do remember that the big old cottonwood trees that used to grow down Armells Creek down below Colstrip, took about 2 years of water logging to kill all of them. So it's a pretty graphic example of the downstream damage. A road crosses down there what used to be the old Culzilka place. And those people raised a lot of alfalfa. And the thing got so water logged that it just grew swamp grass. Finally the fellow who has the place now found a grass that would grow in that besides cattails and swamp grass. And so he gained some good out of it.

Anyway, the bottom lands which are commonly the heart of a ranch, the land that produces hay. Anyway the bottomlands were contaminated, water logged, eroded, alkalined, a variety of words that might fit the situation down there.

I think that most of those guys that saw that coming and sold out and the new owners didn't understand what was happening.

So, anyway, it's gone on and we talk about coal as a real cheap energy but it's a pretty high price if you take in the whole scenario of what it is costing the neighbors. It's a funny thing, I grew up and they always told me that you supposed to leave your land better than it was when you got hold of it. You certainly don't do anything that impacts your neighbors. So this has been going on and on with leaking ponds and a variety of things for some years

now. We've gotten used to it, but it doesn't make it right. And it doesn't really compensate for the problem.

Anyway, I don't if you call that a complaint but I don't see anything being done about it. They are lining some of the ponds now and of course these fly ash ponds it's not a good idea to them to leak. But they've got that Surge Pond there that's leaking and it's the driving force to help drive the leaking fly ash ponds further downstream and move the contaminated water further. Anyway, there is a complex series of issues there, but I don't know where to go with it, but anyway I just want to identify some of the problems.