

SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES

BILL NO. 4

DATE 2/11/05

BILL NO. SB 336

TESTIMONY OF NICK GOLDER ON SB 336

Because I ranch near Colstrip I became quite familiar with how industry reacted when we said they ought to clean up their mess along the way, and when they get done. Unfortunately, there has been a pattern where various industries have resisted attempts to get them to clean up and straighten up. It doesn't seem to matter whether they're fouling up the air, the ground or the water above and under the ground, they usually cry anything from "obstructionism" or "delay" to "it's too expensive."

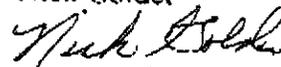
The coal miners sure resisted when we got them to spread out the spoil piles and revegetate. Now they seem quite pleased to talk about and show their reclamation to visitors.

At this time the coalbed methane [CBM] industry has plans to spread itself over a huge scope of country. Included in all the planned activity and well drilling are multiplied thousands of miles of roads, powerlines and pipelines. Also included are several thousand wastewater impoundments holding a wide variety of water quality. It is obvious that such a huge impact can't be allowed to proceed in a helter-skelter fashion. SB336 lays out a very workable way to move development forward in an orderly fashion, and to clean up and put the land back into production after the gas is extracted.

Much of the proposed development would affect productive agricultural land. In the past it has been too often that agriculture has been treated as the unwanted stepchild when a current new development becomes popular. It would be well to remember that ag has been and continues to be an economic backbone for Montana, bringing in a larger portion of income than any of the State's other industries. Tourism and hunting will also take a significant impact from CBM development. We must remember that these two basic industries—ag and hunting/tourism—still need to be able to carry the ball when CBM has run its course and is gone. Aside from reasonable deference to how this "last best place" still looks, there is an economic necessity to restore the self-renewing productivity of the land. These two basic industries will need to be able to get back in stride and move forward.

I believe DEQ is the agency best suited and most capable of administering this very timely and necessary Act. I urge you to vote in favor of SB 336.

Nick Golder



Nick Golder ranches south of Colstrip on Rosebud Creek. He moved there in 1947.