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***Valencia Water Watchers and supporting groups respond
and plan to take action against the Valencia County Commission's
approval of the Natural Resources Overlay Zone Ordinance***

Los Lunas, NM - Valencia Water Watchers and supporting groups will take action on a recently approved ordinance that makes it far too easy to drill for oil & gas drilling in Valencia county.

Last Thursday, July 14th, on a vote of 3–2, the Valencia County Commission approved the Natural Resources Overlay Zone ordinance (NROZ) with amendments – despite hearing nearly 7 hours of public testimony overwhelmingly opposed to the ordinance, including presentations from several expert witnesses. The public's comments cited a range of issues that were not being considered in the NROZ, from inadequate state agency oversight of oil & gas operations, negative health and climate impacts of oil & gas development, the potential for contaminating the Albuquerque Basin Aquifer if fracking were to occur in the county, the lack of tribal consultation, the possibility of significantly increased seismic activity if drilling occurs, and much more.

Drafting of the ordinance was [heavily influenced](#) by the oil & gas industry. Due to vigorous public pressure, the amended NROZ ordinance now includes stricter criteria for oil & gas operations, incorporated directly from the existing Mineral Resource District (MRD) code – which has been in effect since 2004. However, the amended NROZ ordinance still includes special exceptions for oil & gas drilling, a fact of great concern to the community. The July 14th Public Hearing process was flawed and there are several reports that many attendees were unable to hear or to fully participate in the proceeding.

In May of this year, the first version of the NROZ ordinance was pushed through by the County Commission with no public input (other than from oil magnate Mr. Harvey E. Yates, Jr.). The amendments to the second (now adopted) version of the NROZ ordinance were presented at the end of the seven-hour Public Hearing in July, with no advance copies available to the public.

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Statements in response

“Valencia Water Watchers is extremely concerned about this amended Natural Resource Overlay Zone ordinance. If drilling occurs in Valencia County, our community is at risk of earthquakes and contaminated groundwater. Our health and the health of future generations is at risk. We are looking into every option to protect the safety of our community and our water.”

— — Valencia Water Watchers

“As a water rights holder and descendant of the Peralta Land Grant, I am personally disappointed in the negligence of commissioners that voted to keep the NROZ. There is a less than twenty-percent success rate for the proposed project but a nearly certain chance that we will affect the geology of the area, causing seismic activity, and we will contaminate these ancestral Tiwa homelands. We cannot allow any of our water to be contaminated by this industry; we must keep fracking out of Valencia County.”

— — Alejandría Lyons, EJ Organizer,
Southwest Organizing Project

“Because fracking may contaminate the Albuquerque Basin aquifer and the Rio Grande itself, causing an ecological disaster to the riverine Pueblo of Isleta, the Valencia County Commission should have engaged the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs to consult with the Pueblo of Isleta before approving the Natural Resources Overlay Zone. Throughout Valencia County, the existence of Native American archeological resources that could be destroyed by exploration for oil and gas – and consequent earthquakes – further required such government-to-government consultation. In addition, case law demonstrates that at least one commissioner should have recused himself from the vote, owing to a financial conflict of interest. The hearing itself precluded participation by hearing-impaired county residents, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thus this decision was egregious!

— — Teresa Smith de Cherif, Arid Land Specialist,
15-year resident of Valencia County, and physician

“Geologists, Water Experts, Doctors, Indigenous Frontline Groups, youth, and local residents all spoke out against the NROZ ordinance and how oil and gas would be a disaster in Valencia County. Will we leave the next generations a legacy of pollution, contaminating fresh groundwater, and leaving Valencia County tax payers on the hook for clean up? This vote ignores the warnings of scientists and the will of the residents. It is both unethical and unconscionable that commissioners would ram through the NROZ ordinance.”

— — Anni Hanna, NM Climate Justice

“This commission will have a lot to answer for in approving the Natural Resources Overlay Zone ordinance. Valencia county residents overwhelmingly spoke against approving the NROZ and it's unfortunate the majority of the commissioners ignored their constituents. Public officials should be in the role of protecting their communities, not selling them out to an industry that has a proven track record of harming public health and the environment.”

— — Miya King-Flaherty, Organizing Representative,
Sierra Club Rio Grande Chapter

For more information about this developing NROZ ordinance situation, visit
www.ValenciaWaterWatchers.com

About Valencia Water Watchers (VWW): Valencia Water Watchers is a non-political, non-partisan grassroots coalition of local residents advocating for water conservation to ensure a sustainable and equitable future for generations to come. We advocate, promote, and educate about water issues with our community.