

# Did someone "steal" the mineral rights at the Belvoir from under the City's nose?

For the past several months, the County Real Estate office has resembled an ant hill. There has been more activity in less space than is imaginable. Men and women have been scrambling through all records of ownership of land in Laramie County. The Gold Rush(s) could not have seen more hectic activity. And though it may have let up a bit, the Real Estate office is still abuzz with activity.

Whether there is gold (oil, gas, etc.) in them thar hills or not, there are a lot of companies in the business who believe, or hope, there is.

I had received a tip the other day that there is a guy in town who is chortling about sort of "stealing" the mineral rights for the City of Cheyenne owned Belvoir Ranch.

Believing that such a scenario would be consistent with so many of their "asleep at the switch" failures, I took a half-step into record reviewing myself. Not like the pros are conducting - just something that

I hoped would tell me whether the likely brag about fleecing the City was true or not. I thought I probably had the answer.

Am I in a position this Sunday before printing this issue to state unequivocally that the City got its pockets picked? No. But I probably can write accurately that someone other than the City has acquired mineral (oil and gas) rights and/or leases on that City ranch - and possibly the Happy Jack landfill property as well.

Now there may be perfectly good explanations for that happened. It could be that the mayor and council just do not believe the hype about the "possibility" of minerals under the land out there and purposely did not try to acquire the mineral rights before an out-of-towner did.

Or they may have believed there may be millions of dollars of value to the mineral rights but simply did not have the money to pull the trigger. Or they feared criticism of the populace about another hare-brained scheme at the Belvoir and were

afraid to do what they thought would be in the long-term best interests of residents. Whether it's airlines or trees, tattoo shops or potholes, this mayor just can't seem to catch a break.

It is possible that the earlier holder of the mineral rights did not offer them to the City for one reason or another. Personal perhaps? We can only guess.

Or, the City may have simply been out-manuevered. Someone else snuck in under cover of night and leased or bought the mineral rights that the City may not even have known existed.

Whatever the explanation, I can tell you after a cursory review of land documents involving the Belvoir that there has been one helluva lot of activity since the first of the year, since January of 2010. The City should have heard through the grapevine that someone was pulling the records or that someone was peddling the rights and should have, at minimum, known what was happening that might affect the surface rights (and minimal water rights) that the City holds on the Belvoir. But it doesn't appear they were aware because it was recently announced the City would have a work session to be told of the plans by one of the purchasers/lessors.

Let me comment here that my ability to even get as far as I have is due to the cooperation of the Laramie County Assessor's office and the Laramie County Real Estate office. The Assessor's office provided legal descriptions of the land known as the Belvoir Ranch and the Real Estate office printed details of each legal description's history, some going back a very long time. To receive that level of cooperation was truly appreciated.

Interestingly, there is not a single lengthy legal description for the land at the Belvoir. It was a list of legal descriptions that made it possible for the Real Estate office to

print out the dozens of pages of the land records I sought.

Reviewing the land data indicates that a great deal of activity took place early this year after years of dormancy.

From the legal descriptions provided by the Assessor's office, I have 29 records (~100 pages) of land parcels.

The vast majority of the records reflect that T. Verne Dwyer was granted an "OPTION TO LEASE" from Etcheparre LCC on January 15, 2010 and the Option was recorded on February 11, 2010. A lease was entered into on April 5, 2010 and was recorded April 8th. Then, Dwyer made an "OIL & GAS ASSIGNMENT" to Rubicon Oil & Gas II LP on June 27, 2010 and that assignment was recorded at the Laramie County Real Estate office July 6, 2010.

Predating these transactions, Warren Live Stock Co. ET AL granted a Mineral Deed to Etcheparre LLC on June 29, 2001 - a Deed that was recorded August 2, 2001.

As a refresher, the City of Cheyenne purchased what is called the Belvoir Ranch from Timnath Land & Cattle Co. IV LLC (along with limited water rights) on July 2, 2003 and the Deed was recorded six days later. The City entered into a grazing lease with Wyoming Cattle Co, Inc. on March 12, 2004 and that lease was recorded May 6, 2004.

Any questions to this point? I didn't think so. Tracking this data is like twisting into position a Rubik's Cube.

Basically, Rubicon has Gas & Oil Assignments on much of the land. However, on two, the Schwarzbrott Family Trust has recorded a Mineral Quitclaim Deed (August 16, 2010) so that could get interesting. There are also a couple documents involving Questar Exploration & Production. Mostly Rubicon, though.

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