Dave Blackmon in Forbes Energy 1/14/2013

"This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." – From The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

Artesia Wells, TX – Elements of the anti-fracking movement wasted no time in capitalizing on a January 13 report in the San Antonio Express News in which oilfield workers near Artesia Wells in the Eagle Ford Shale region report seeing "unidentified lights in the night skies" and even captured blurry video footage of one of them. The association of the UFO phenomenon with hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking" as it has come to be known, created an immediate sensation throughout the anti-fracking community.

The Park Foundation was the first to jump in, announcing that it would fund a study to be conducted by Cornell University Professors Anthony Ingraffea and Robert Howarth to explore the emissions implications of UFO traffic caused by fracking. "We don't know at this time how these spaceships are powered," Howarth stated, "but if it's related to fracking, well, it just can't be anything good."

Shortly after the Park Foundation announcement, anti-fracking activists Sean Lennon and Yoko Ono announced they would stage a free concert in Central Park in early February to raise awareness of the growing threat of fracking-related UFO activity. "We're, like, really concerned, you know?" Lennon said when asked about the event's goal, "Like, UFOs and fracking – it's a growing threat to everyone."

Ms. Ono was even more emphatic, urging everyone to wake up, "Because if we don't do something about it, we're all going to die. I mean, I've read H.G. Wells – I know the damage these spaceships from Mars can do to the earth. Laser beams and fracking are going to destroy the earth."

A spokesperson for the Sierra Club said that organization would also respond to the growing crisis of fracking-related UFO activity by hiring noted UFOlogist Whitley Strieber – author of a series of UFO-related books – to serve as co-Director of its Beyond Natural Gas campaign. When asked if the organization really believed there is a link between hydraulic fracturing and UFO activity, the spokesperson – who spoke on condition of anonymity – said "Not really, but we sure do think it'll help with our fundraising."

In Hollywood, Actor Matt Damon, fresh on the heels of the box office failure of his anti-fracking film "Promised Land", refused to comment on rumors that he would team up with author Erich Von Daniken on a film whose working title is reported to be "Drilling Rigs of the Gods".

Elsewhere….

Ok, ok, in case your sarcasm meter isn't working today, it's time I pointed out that the above is merely parody, not an actual news story. Well, everything except for the bit about the report in the San Antonio Express News about oilfield workers in the Eagle Ford Shale apparently seeing lights in the sky that they couldn't explain – that part is real. And I'm not making fun of those guys, since I grew up in the Eagle Ford region of Texas , and know first hand that reports of such strange lights in the night sky have been a regular part of life down there for decades.

No, I'm making fun of those in the anti-fracking movement, who regularly go to absurd lengths to demonize a technology that has been in use for 65 years, and that, when combined with horizontal drilling, has in recent years brought about an economic renaissance to many parts of our country.

Now, you might say that the parody above is absurd, that these people would never jump to such conclusions or say such ridiculous things. I'd reply that yes, the parody is absurd, but it is only marginally more absurd than things these people have said and done already where natural gas and fracking are concerned.

Take the erstwhile Ms. Ono as an example. Here is an actual quote from the woman whose only real knowledge about fracturing relates to doing it to rock bands:

"Fracking kills," [Yoko] Ono said. "And it doesn't just kill us. It kills the land, nature and eventually the whole world and our dear planet, which we think is a beautiful one."

Well, the planet is indeed beautiful, but is anything else in that quote substantiated by anything resembling fact or sound science? Not really, yet Ms. Ono has become a media darling in the anti-fracking movement, with her irrational, false statements quoted without critical comment on a routine basis.

How about Mr. Ingraffea, who has teamed with Ms. Ono to spread the utter nonsense allegation that 60% of natural gas well just spring leaks over their lifetime? This contention was completely decimated by Steve Everley at EnergyInDepth.com early last week. Ingraffea and Dr. Howarth authored a study on methane emissions a couple of years ago that was thoroughly debunked within about 30 minutes of its issuance, yet their absurd findings continue to be parrotted by the anti-fracking movement and an often incurious news media as if they were unchallenged fact.

To my knowledge, the Sierra Club has yet to hire a UFOlogist, but it did hire a former EPA regional administrator, Al Armendariz, who had to resign his position in disgrace when he was caught on video
bragging about regularly using a tactic to demonize oil and gas companies that he himself favorably compared to "crucifiction". I leave it to the reader to decide if he is any more credible than Mr. Strieber might be.

The bottom line is this: Hydraulic Fracturing, or "Fracking", has been made the target of a concentrated, highly organized and mostly false campaign of disinformation and demonization by those in the anti-development movement. This constant smokescreen of hyperbolic nonsense distracts the public and policymakers from dealing with the real issues that everyone agrees come along with the highly positive aspects of oil and natural gas development.

The continued development of shale oil and natural gas in the U.S. holds too much promise for

the nation's otherwise faltering economy to allow policy decisions to be made on anything other than sound science, fact and reason. That the opposition feels the need to constantly engage in this kind of deception tells us all we need to know about how they see the relative strength of their arguments.

In the meantime, it would be productive for everyone if news reporters worked hard to avoid resembling the newsman in "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance". This is not the old West, and there is nothing admirable about printing legends that have little if any connection to fact.