



## GUEST OPINION

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### Northeast Iowans know best on frac sand mining

By David Osterberg

Northeast Iowans should dig deeper than the Heartland Institute's promotion of frac-sand mining (April 30 *Register*).<sup>1</sup>

Heartland's Isaac Orr mischaracterized the view of the state geologist, Bob Libra, suggesting fewer environmental impacts from sand mining than other mining. Actually, Libra told Winneshiek County supervisors a single frac sand mine would pose no more threat than a gravel quarry or standard sand pit.<sup>2</sup>

But this is not about just one mine. Orr advocates a "boom" in mines and he ignored Libra's stated concerns about establishing dozens of mines in small areas, as in southwest Wisconsin. Orr correctly noted that Libra also cited concerns with sand processing facilities, where large volumes of groundwater are used and impurities in the sand are washed away.

Iowa's best trout streams are in Northeast Iowa, are groundwater-fed and could be on the receiving end of sand impurities. The sand eventually will be used in a fracking process that itself presents great risk to water quality and geologic stability.

Northeast Iowa residents see the natural beauty of their region, promote it and see opportunity. Orr misses this, seeing only "generally low-paying, seasonal jobs providing only part-time work for full-time residents."

Three recent economic studies of mining activities in Wisconsin examine tradeoffs. Mining jobs pay more, but miners are more likely to be from outside the region, bring few family members and spend less locally — unlike full-time residents working tourism jobs. Thus, no boon to the community.

When mining removes the bluffs from "Iowa's Bluff Country," and the temporary mining jobs with them, what is left?

Residents of Allamakee and Winneshiek counties, and their county supervisors, are using restrictions on mining or processing of frac sand to protect their health, homes, communities, resources and beautiful landscapes. So far they are doing a good job for our state.

*David Osterberg, former executive director of the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project in Iowa City, co-authored a January 2014 report, "Digging Deeper on Frac Sand Mining," available at [www.iowapolicyproject.org](http://www.iowapolicyproject.org). Contact: [dosterberg@iowapolicyproject.org](mailto:dosterberg@iowapolicyproject.org).*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/pmv3egv>

<sup>2</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/ppczlzn>