

Editorial

A Contrarian's View of Property Values

By Tony Corrado

Living in the western plains it is easy to get entangled in the debate on property values. What exactly are property values?

For most people it is easy to understand that if you purchased land, you own it. If you were fortunate enough to purchase water and mineral rights then you may own these also. Unfortunately, the view taken by most property owners is that a concrete wall extends beneath their land to trap the water, oil and gas (and other minerals such as uranium, coal etc.). In addition they believe that this wall extends upwards into the atmosphere to show that they also own the air above their land. If this "vision" were accurate then the concept of individual property values might have some merit. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the reality.

The water beneath any land is interconnected to the all of the water beneath adjoining lands. Consequently, if a land owner were to sell their water to, say, an oil company, then 15 millions of water pumped from their "property" is going to lower the available water on all the lands close to the pumping unit. In effect, they could be selling your water. The same concept applies to air. If an oil company burns the gas coming from an oil well, and if the prevailing winds carry that poisonous gas onto your dwelling, then their "property right" is affecting you and costing you in both real estate value as well as health.

Yet, I suspect most "property right" advocates would still argue that it is their right to do as they please. I would ask these people to consider this scenario.

In Japan, 2013, a tsunami completely destroyed the Fukushima nuclear power plant. This plant is owned by Tokyo Electric Power company. The land, the power plant and the air above it are, by our definitions, their "property right". For the last two years this plant has been using sea water to cool the reactor fuel rods in order to keep it from blowing up and sending nuclear radiation into the air, onto the land and into the sea. The water leaks thus far are 520 metric tons of water that leaked and over 300,000 tons that were intentionally released into the sea. One month after the incident radiation from this disaster was found 2000 Km away and 5000 Km deep in the waters tested. Radiation has reached the mid Pacific region and is expected to reach the western coast of North America early next year. In fairness, it must be stated that the radiation levels reaching NA are not now posing an imminent health dangers to Americans.

As a contrarian however, I wonder if any person or corporation actually has a legitimate claim to their "property rights?" Can the Tokyo Electric Power company freely contaminate the largest ocean in the world with radiation which is already contaminating sea life. Should BP be allowed to contaminate the Gulf of Mexico with crude oil? Should your neighbor be allowed to drain an aquifer of water that your family needs to live simply because of an accident of birth? Or should these "property rights" actually belong to everyone?

*When all the trees have been cut down,
when all the animals have been hunted,
when all the waters are polluted,
when all the air is unsafe to breathe,
only then will you discover you cannot eat money.*

~ Cree Prophecy ~