

WHAT'S

NEXT

2015



Davis
outside
Boulder,
Colorado

The Nate Silver of Fracking Will Defeat Industry Giants

SHANE DAVIS IS DATA-MINING THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY TO WIN HEARTS, MINDS, AND LEGISLATIVE BATTLES

by Bryan Schatz

IT MAY HAVE started in Pennsylvania, but the biggest fracking fight in the country is now taking place in Colorado. And the most important man in the ring is 45-year-old Shane Davis, a self-identified fractivist, who wants a total ban on the practice. Some activists focus their energy on civil disobedience, others on protests. Davis crunches data, digging deep into state and industry records to illuminate fracking's damage across the state.

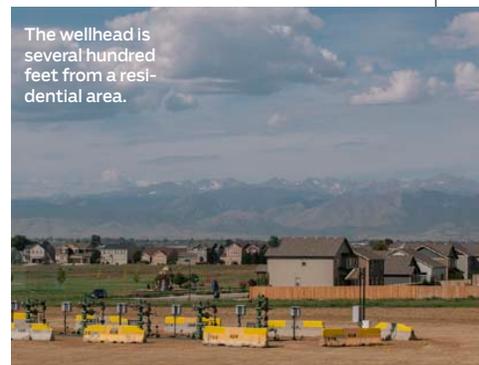
"Forty-three percent of all operator spills have already caused groundwater con-

tamination in Weld County, Colorado," he says. "One point seven million gallons of toxic waste was never recovered from the ground."

Davis distributes those findings via his website, Fractivist.org, to environmental activists, ranchers, and homeowners, who then use them to enact local moratoriums and bans. "Shane is not just a thorn in the side of Colorado's oil and gas industry, he's become a model for other fractivists and a nexus of information," says Lee Buchsbaum, a reporter who has covered the



Chemical burners
at a wellhead in
Mead, Colorado



The wellhead is
several hundred
feet from a resi-
dential area.

energy industry for 15 years. "Much of the resistance building along the Front Range is due to his efforts."

While working with the Sierra Club in late 2009, Davis was researching a matter unrelated to fracking: the dumping of 172 barrels of toxic waste, allegedly buried near a river north of Denver. An activist who goes by the name Nancy Drew sent Davis to the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission website, where by law data on the state's fracking activity must be logged. The site wasn't a secret, but it was nearly impossible to navigate.

"It's like, which door do I go through to get the data I'm looking for?" says Davis. The answer: all of them. It's less a matter of technical wizardry than suffering through "thousands of hours" of distillation. To remedy the situation, Davis is creating a user-friendly site supplied with the industry's own data. "Residents can plug in their address and pull up the information they need," he says.

He's also branching out. Davis is employing the same methods of data extraction for activist groups in California and Florida, and he's giving seminars across the country, creating a legion of data miners who can spur their own movements. It's that spread of information that Davis believes will win against what he calls a "rogue industry."

"This is a method that the industry cannot beat," he says.