



Keith Fossen never expected to join a grassroots environmental group, let alone help organize one from the ground up.

"I was so far over there on the conservative side ... whenever I heard of anyone trying to do something for the environment, I was suspicious," Fossen said during an interview with Truthout. "I thought anything environmental was trying to control business."

Fossen and his wife Amy Nelson live in rural Hay Creek Township located about 10 miles from the Mississippi River on the outskirts of Red Wing, Minnesota. Fossen is an entrepreneur and CEO of a business education services firm. For years, he agreed with other conservatives that environmental causes were bad for business. His tune began to change, however, as the frack-sand rush started knocking on his back door.

"I'm a conservative businessman, and it's so interesting the people I'm hanging out with ... I'm hanging out with environmentalists," Fossen said in a Red Wing coffee shop.

Sandstone formations in eastern Minnesota and across the Mississippi River in Wisconsin contain high quantities of silica particles of a desirable size and shape for hydraulic fracturing. Fracking, an unconventional oil and gas drilling technique, uses high volumes of water laced with silica and chemicals to break up underground rock and release fossil fuels. Fracking is not big in Minnesota, but the fracking boom in states such as North Dakota, Ohio and Pennsylvania has exponentially increased the demand for frack sand from the area.

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