

Status of Orphan & Idle Oil Wells in Santa Barbara County

Board of Supervisors Hearing
November 4, 2025



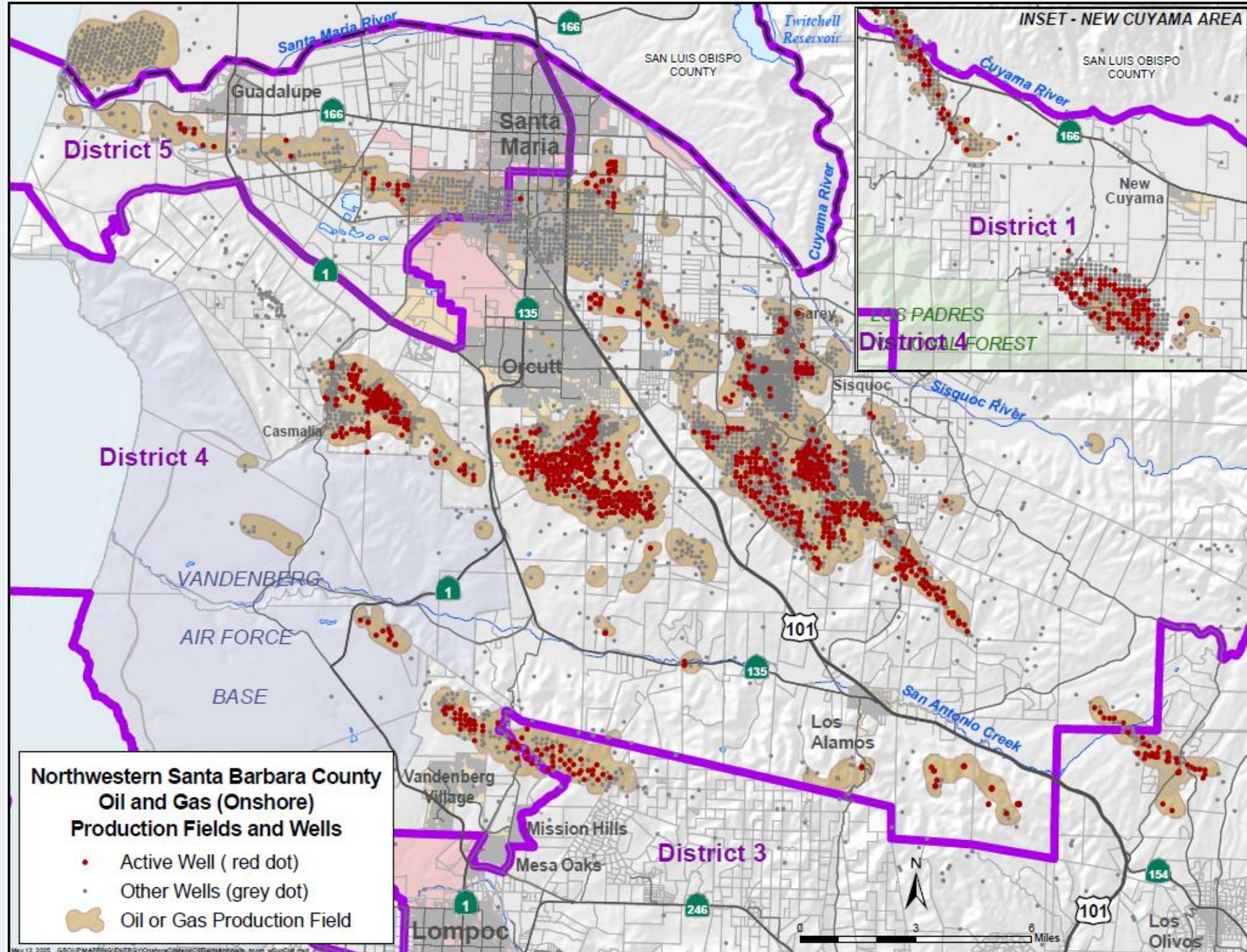
County of Santa Barbara
Planning and Development
Errin Briggs

Introduction

- On September 16th, the Board directed staff to provide a status report on the number, location and condition of orphan and idle wells in Santa Barbara County

Current Setting

- 2,260 active and idle wells in the County
 - 1,039 are active (46%)
 - 1,221 are idle (54%)
- 3,663 wells have been plugged and abandoned



Idle Well - Definitions

The County defines “idle wells” differently than CalGEM:

- County Code Chapter 25 (Petroleum Code): Any well that has not produced oil or natural gas or has not been used for injection for six consecutive months of continuous operation during the last five or more years.
- CalGEM: A well that has not been used for two years or more and has not yet been properly plugged and abandoned (sealed and closed)



Idle Well Requirements

- County does not have any requirements specific to idle wells.
- CalGEM updated its idle well regulations in 2019 to create more stringent testing and reporting requirements
- Requires idle wells to be tested and, if necessary, repaired, or permanently sealed and closed
- Operators are incentivized to enter into Idle Well Management Plans (IWMP) - or pay annual idle well fees



CalGEM and AB 1866 (Hart)

- AB 1866 (2024) built upon the previous requirements:
- Operators are required to prioritize which wells to address first, taking into account age of the well, potential risks posed to life, health, property, or natural resources and proximity to sensitive receptors
- Increased the annual idle well penalty fees and requirements for idle well abandonment



CalGEM and AB 1866 (Hart)

- Idle Well Management Plans requires the elimination of long-term idle wells through abandonment / returning to use or pay idle well fees

Years Idle	Fee
0 – 2.99	\$1,000
3 – 7.99	\$2,500
8 – 14.99	\$5,000
15 – 19.99	\$12,500
20 +	\$22,500

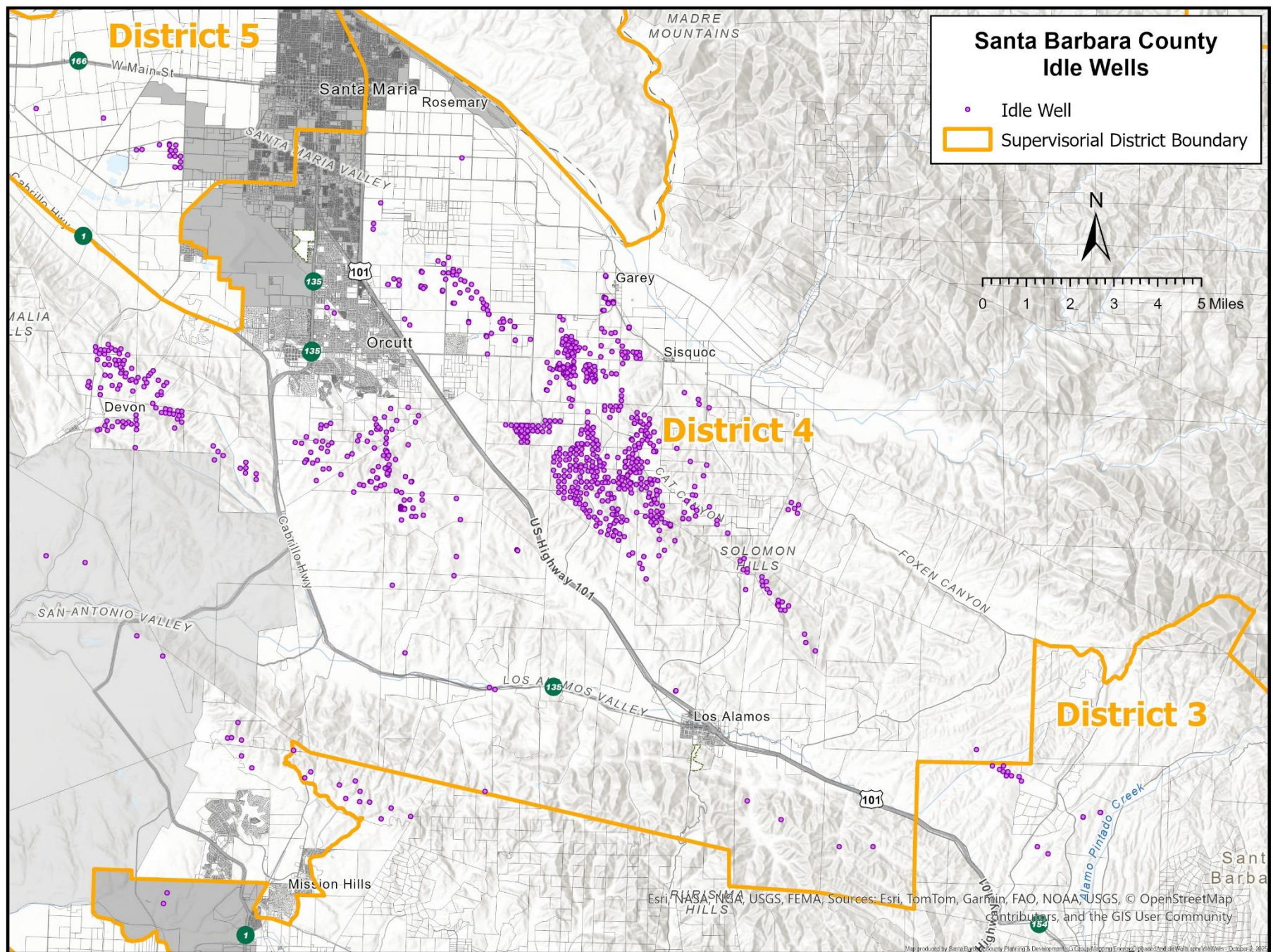
State-Wide Idle Well Count	CY 2025-2027	CY 2028-2029	CY 2030
0-250	5%	6%	8%
251-1,250	6%	8%	10%
1,251-3,000	7%	10%	15%
3,001+	15%	18%	20%



Idle Well Management Plans

- In Santa Barbara County:
 - 32 Operators with 1,221 idle wells Countywide
 - 11 Operators have formal Idle Well Management Plans
 - Includes 472 idle wells
 - 114 to be abandoned over the next 8 years (24%)





Orphan Wells

- CalGEM Definition: A well that has no responsible party, making it the state's responsibility to plug and abandon
- County does not have a legal or financial responsibility to address orphan wells
- County Petroleum Unit inspects all wells including orphan wells, on an annual basis for health and safety purposes and to ensure the minimum standards of Chapter 25 are maintained



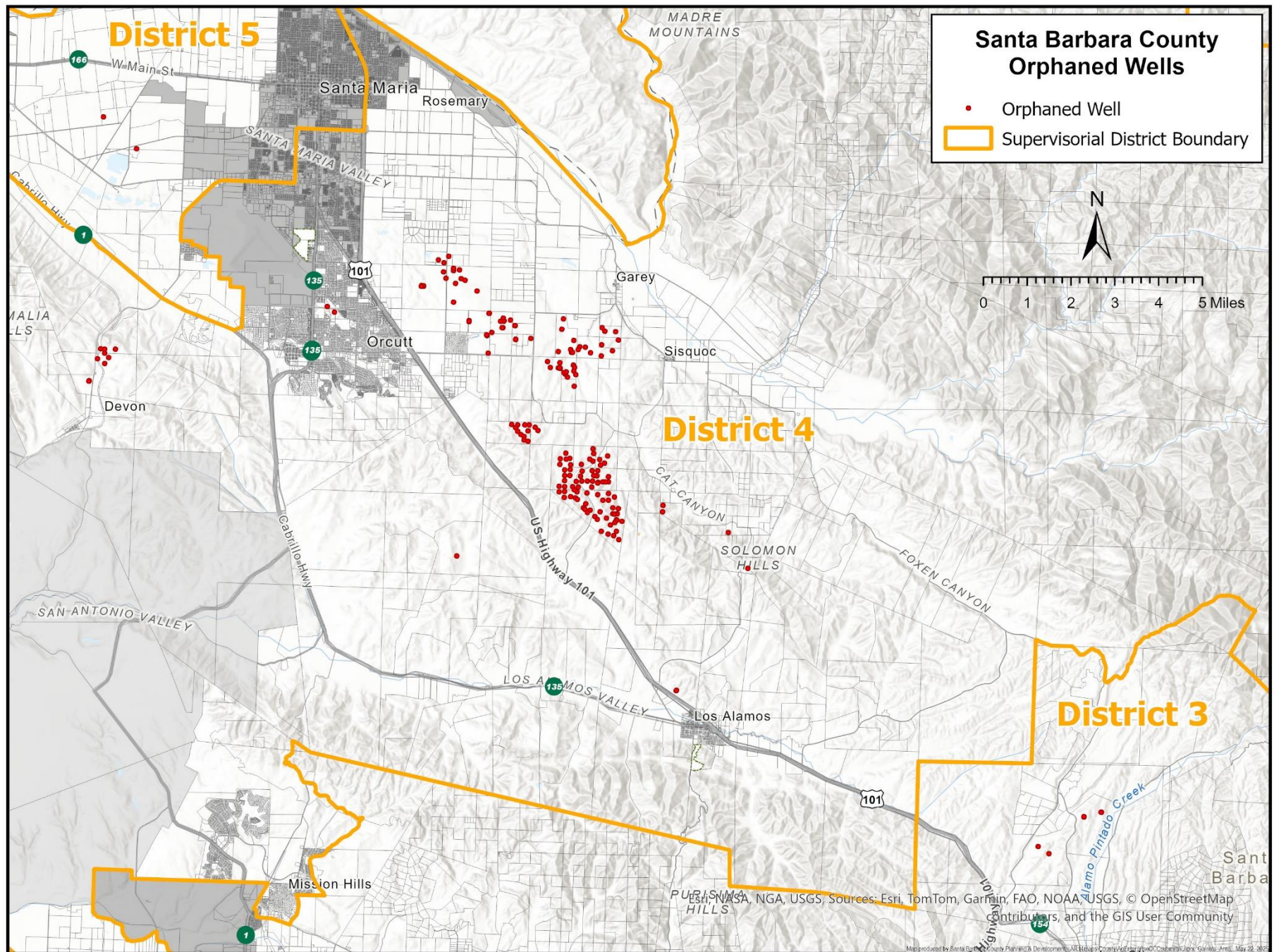
CalGEM - Orphan Well Abandonment Expenditure Plan

- CalGEM's Oil and Gas Well Abandonment Expenditure Program tracks and prioritizes all orphan wells in the state
- CalGEM facilitates the plugging and abandonment of orphan oil and gas wells and decommissioning of associated production facilities
- Seeks financially solvent responsible party dating back to 1996

CalGEM – Orphan Wells

- Wells are prioritized based upon level of risk for leaking, any historic compliance issues, and/or proximity to sensitive receptors
- Highest risk wells were abandoned in Phase I – 378 wells and 51 facilities (Completed 2023-2025)
- Phase II includes remaining high-risk wells – 217 wells and 74 facilities – beginning later this year





Summary of Orphan Wells - Santa Barbara County

Operator	Number of Orphan Wells (as of 2023)	Abandoned by CalGEM Phase I (Completed)	To be Abandoned by CalGEM Phase II	Remaining to be Abandoned by CalGEM at Later Date
HVI Cat Canyon	210	172	11	27
Angel Petroleum	151	0	0	151
Total	361	172	11	178



Board Action

That the Board of Supervisors:

- Receive and file a report on the status of orphan and idle wells in the County of Santa Barbara; and
- Determine that the above action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to section 15378(b)(5) of the CEQA guidelines, because they consist of administrative activities of the government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.).



Status of Orphan & Idle Oil Wells in Santa Barbara County

Board of Supervisors Hearing
November 4, 2025



County of Santa Barbara
Planning and Development
Errin Briggs