



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Board of Supervisors
Department No.: 011
For Agenda Of: April 5, 2011
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Tme: 30 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Board Member(s) Salud Carbajal, First District County Supervisor
Contact Info: Jeremy Tittle, Executive Assistant
Office of Supervisor Carbajal 568-2182
SUBJECT: Report on Summerland Abandoned Oil Wells

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the County Board of Supervisors receive a preliminary report from staff and send the attached recommended correspondence to the California State Lands Commission and the California State Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources seeking a presentation to the Board regarding seepage from natural and manmade sources in the Lookout Point area of Summerland, and requesting a report to the Board by the appropriate State agencies on previous oil exploration in other areas of the County such as the Coal Oil Point and other areas of coastal Santa Barbara County.

Summary Text:

Over the last several years, there have been community discussions and State and Federal agency inquiries regarding the issue of oil seepage along the Santa Barbara coast and the role that abandoned 19th and early 20th century wells have played. In response to recent concerns regarding increased seepage from the Summerland community, the logical next step appears to be to invite the appropriate State and/or Federal authorities provide a presentation to the Board regarding oil seepage along the Santa Barbara coast and what role previous oil drilling well sites play in oil contamination of the Santa Barbara coast. This presentation will help ensure that the Board is informed of impacts to the coastline,

what actions have been taken previously regarding abandoned oil wells, and what potential future remediations could be considered.

Background:

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, considerable oil exploration occurred along the Santa Barbara County coast; including in tidal and near-shore waters. It is widely recognized that when these coastal oil wells were finished in the productive usefulness, responsible parties abandoned or “capped” the wells using inadequate techniques. The responsible parties – developers at the time – have not been in existence for decades. Therefore, responsibility for the oil wells abandoned in the State coastal area has reverted to the State Lands Commission.

In July 2010, several departments of the County of Santa Barbara received complaints from concerned citizens living in the Summerland area. While natural seepage in the area is historically present, community and scientific questions have arisen regarding the amount of surface oil present from previous – and long abandoned – drilling sites along the tidal zone in the Summerland area and other areas of the County.

On June 22, 2010, a State Lands Commission employee reported to the State Warning Center, three 50’ x 50’ sheens along the Summerland coast. The report quotes that the, “Caller states they noticed a release of old weathered oil off the coast and close to the shore ... off the coast of Summerland.” The caller reportedly went on to state that the release was suspected to be from old oil wells in the area and is a natural occurrence in the area. It is not known which was the predominant cause.

On Wednesday, September 8, 2010, State Lands Commission (SLC) and Santa Barbara County Parks, attended a meeting of the Summerland Citizens Association (SCA) to address their concerns with the abandoned wells in State waters and the oil along the shoreline. The SLC representative stated that the amount of oil on the beach was not actually an increase in the amount of product but due to the time of year and calmer seas. SLC also provided a history stating that the wells in that area were drilled in the late 1800’s early 1900s. The wells were abandoned, once the underlying reservoirs were no longer economically and/or technically recoverable under market conditions and technological capabilities of that time. At the time there were no standards or regulations directing how abandonment should be completed and that the well casings were plugged using telephone poles, scrap metal, rags, rocks and other debris. Since being abandoned, the structures have deteriorated and they are uncertain of current conditions. There are 412 abandoned or inactive wells in the Summerland area, 220 of which are on the beach or the near shore area. The State did fund a mitigation project in the early 1990s that succeeded in

capping three abandoned wells and a joint project some years later involving State Lands Commission, Fish & Game, and the US Coast Guard documented levels of petroleum flow on the beach.

The recent report, “Summerland’s leaking oil wells Physical and Social Effects” (Leifer, et al.; April 2007 (OSPR Technical Publication No. 07-001) (Attachment 2))), found identified drilling that had occurred into a now-known fault zone. The drilling into a fault zone exacerbates the complexities around a solution to stop seepage from the drilling site.

State and Federal authorities have collaborated in examining the issue of offshore abandoned oil well impacts. Given the complexities involved and the potential for continued negative environmental impacts from these abandoned oil wells, a presentation to the Board is recommended.

Performance Measure:

Not Applicable.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No There is no fiscal impact associated with the sending of the attached letter to the State or with receiving a presentation by State and/or Federal staff.

Fiscal Analysis:

<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Current FY Cost:</u>	<u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u>	<u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u>
General Fund	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
State			
Federal			
Fees			
Other:			
Total	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00

Narrative:

Not Applicable.

Staffing Impacts:

Legal Positions:
0

FTEs:
0

Special Instructions:

None.

Attachments:

1. Recommended letter from the Board to the California State Lands Commission and California Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources.
2. Report: Oil Emissions from Nearshore and Onshore Summerland: Final Report (April 11, 2007)
3. Letter from Elena M. Miller, State Oil and Gas Supervisor, Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources
4. Memo from California State Lands Commission regarding Santa Barbara Channel Hazards Removal Program

Authored by:

Jeremy Tittle

cc:

Michael D. Harris, Emergency Operations Chief, Santa Barbara County

Thomas Fayram, Interim Director, County Parks Department

Doug Anthony, Deputy Director, Santa Barbara County Energy Division

Mayors: City of Carpinteria

City of Goleta

City of Santa Barbara

Cindy Sapienza, President, Summerland Citizens Association