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ENV-OIL

The New York Times 7-19-83

In 3 Years, Most Effects of Largest Tanker Spill Were Gone

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ON March 18, 1978, the supertanker Amoco Cadiz ran on rocks a few miles off the Brittany coast of France. Over the next two weeks of stormy weather its entire cargo of 223,000 metric tons — most of it crude oil — was discharged into the sea. It was the largest tanker oil spill to date, almost twice the volume of the largest previous spill, that of the Torrey Canyon off Cornwall in 1967.

Since several marine research laboratories were located in the spill's neighborhood, its effects were intensively studied. Now six American and French scientists who participated in the research have sought to assemble and report what has been learned so far about the fate of the oil and its effect on marine life along the coast of Brittany near the wreck.

Although 5,000 tons of contaminated oysters had to be destroyed, the researchers have found that within three years "the most obvious effects of the spill" had passed. Only in estuaries and marshes that had been most heavily oiled did above-normal concentrations of hydrocarbons remain.

An estimated 30 percent of the oil, chiefly its more volatile constituents, evaporated while still at sea. Furthermore, it appears that 10,000 tons of oil had been broken down by bacteria before reaching the coast.

"To our knowledge," wrote the authors of the report in the July 8 issue of the journal Science, "this represents the first documentation of a case where biodegredation contributed significantly to the early removal of hydrocarbons from the environment."

Nevertheless, in the first weeks after the spill, some 62,000 tons of oil came ashore. Another 18,000 tons was deposited on the sea floor below the tidal zone, with extensive, though short-lived, effects on fisheries. Reproduction of bottom fish, such as sole, was severely curtailed. In the following year young sole seem to have been totally absent from the Bay of Lannion, 50 miles east of the spill.

The catches of crabs and lobsters, favorite Breton delicacies, had returned to normal by 1979, but a shortage of egg-carrying female lobsters at that time may presage reduced harvests this year and next. No effect was evident on harvests of scallops, mussels and clams, although accumulations of hydrocarbons were found in some species.

Hard hit, however, were the oyster farms of two inlets near the wreck site — Aber Benoit and Aber Wrac'h — and in the Bay of Morlaix. Between 20 percent and 50 percent of the oysters died and the rest were inedible, forcing destruction of almost the entire crop. Some oysters transplanted to clean waters purged themselves, but until 1980 fresh ones introduced to the inlets became tainted. Production of marketable shellfish finally resumed in 1981.

Several British and French research vessels sampled offshore waters in the months following the spill and found oil concentrations far below those recorded following the subsequent blowout of Mexico's Ixtoc One oil well. In the open sea, oil concentrations were back to normal within a month. Closer to the coast they remained high for another month, but before the end of the year they were normal even in the estuaries.

Periodic sampling of sediment from the floors of several bays indicated that almost all of the oil contamination had vanished within a year and a half. Most of it, the group believes, was removed by storm processes, although bacterial activity was not measured.

Of the 62,000 tons that came ashore, 25,000 tons were collected by thousands of cleanup workers. Six weeks after the spill only 10,000 tons remained; the most efficient cleansing agents, according to the report, were waves and tidal action, although the authors believe microbes also played a major role.

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ENV-OIL

Major Calif. Oil Finds Concern Ecologists

By Jay Mathews
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 18—California environmentalists have begun to warn that pristine stretches of the Santa Barbara area coastline may be seriously harmed as oil companies continue to uncover what may be one of the largest oil fields ever found in the United States.

Following reports of two separate giant oil discoveries by groups headed by Chevron U.S.A. Inc. and Phillips Petroleum Co. and by Texaco U.S.A., the California Coastal Commission Wednesday rejected a request from the Union Oil Co. to test drill another expected giant oil field in the federally protected eastern end of the Santa Barbara channel.

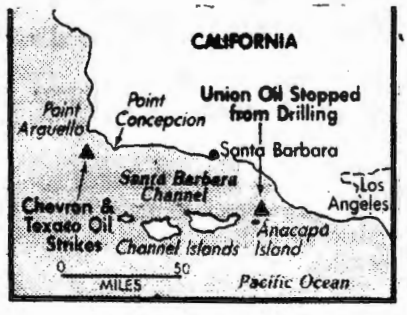
The potential size of the new discoveries near the western end of the channel is so great that environmentalists say they fear irresistible federal and corporate pressure to open offshore areas further up the coast to oil drilling, particularly since California's Democratic governor, Edmund G. (Jerry) Brown Jr., an active opponent of much offshore drilling, is about to be succeeded by Republican George Deukmejian.

"Nothing justifies in our opinion any further driving north to satisfy a gluttonous appetite for energy," said Sierra Club vice president Michele Perrault. In particular, she mentioned the danger to sea otters in a region that federal officials have targeted for leasing.

The waters off the Santa Barbara coast have attracted oil explorers ever since petroleum was found seeping naturally out of the seabed a century ago. But the major discoveries reported during the last four weeks in the Santa Maria Basin, about 40 miles west of President Reagan's mountaintop ranch, have inspired visions of an oil pool beneath the sea bottom rivaling the one found beneath Alaska's Prudhoe Bay, the largest in U.S. history with an estimated 10 billion barrels.

So far, the oil companies have confined themselves to much lower estimates, about 300 million barrels for a field being tested by Chevron, Phillips and other companies 15 miles west of Point Concepcion and about 100 million barrels for a discovery confirmed this week by a group including Texaco and the Pennzoil Co. in the same area. "It's just too soon to tell exactly what is there," said Chevron spokesman Dale Basye. But several companies are making plans for more offshore oil rigs and drilling ships, which carry the risk of future oil spills.

"It's absolutely predicted that a certain number of spills will occur in the lifetime of those fields," said Ruthann Corwin, a marine environmental planner who has participated in state and Santa Barbara County studies of the area. She said the rocky coast north of Point Concepcion is practically untouched except for a few occasional skin divers; it harbors unique species of barnacles and abalone. Sea otters, now rebounding after being decimated by hunters, are also expected to move into the area from the north.



By Richard Furno—The Washington Post

Michael Fischer, executive director of the coastal commission, said the oil discoveries have drawn so much industry interest he expects his staff will begin considering long-range limits on oil drilling. In the key area from San Luis Obispo down to just northwest of Los Angeles, he said, "We have 20 offshore platforms [drawing oil] now, and there are prospects now of perhaps doubling that number." The most recent tests have drawn particular interest because the oil found appears to be low in sulfur and of a light variety easy to refine into gasoline.

Fischer said he saw no chance, however, that California's offshore waters will grow a virtual forest of oil rigs, as has happened in some parts of the Gulf of Mexico. He said he does not plan to oppose oil drilling in state-owned waters three miles from shore near the Santa Maria Basin finds, despite objections by environmentalists.

The commission rejected Union Oil's request to drill two exploratory wells near Anacapa Island because the area is within the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuaries, a haven for brown pelicans and other marine life. This week, Exxon Co. U.S.A. announced it was seeking permission to expand its offshore drilling at a site about halfway between the Union Oil and Chevron-Texaco areas. The plan calls for two to four more platforms to help take out an estimated 400 million barrels of oil.

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OIL
SAN FRANCISCO (UPI) -- A NEW CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE OIL INDUSTRY AND ENVIROMENTALISTS WAS A POSSIBILITY THURSDAY IN LIGHT OF AN OIL COMPANY'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF A MAJOR OIL DISCOVERY NEAR THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL.

THE NEWS FROM TEXACO U.S.A., ALONG WITH SUMILAR ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM OTHER FIRMS IN RECENT DAYS, WAS EXPECTED TO SET OFF A FRENZY OF OIL DEVELOPMENT IN FEDERAL OFFSHORE TRACTS.

CALIFORNIA -- FACING A BUDGET DEFICIT -- IS CONSIDERING A PROPOSAL TO HOLD ITS OWN OFFSHORE LEASE SALE IN A ZONE IT OWNS BETWEEN POINT ARGUELLO AND POINT CONCEPTION ADJOINING THE AREA OF THE NEW FINDS.

THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION, WHICH HAS A VETO POWER OVER FEDERAL LEASING PLANS, WAS SET UP TO PROTECT THE SHORELINES AND OFFSHORE FISHING RIGHTS AND HAS STOPPED OIL DRILLING IN THE PAST IN FRAGILE AREAS.

THE STATE SALE, WHICH COULD BE HELD LATER THIS YEAR OR EARLY NEXT YEAR, WOULD BE THE FIRST LEASING IN STATE-CONTROLLED WATERS SINCE 1969, THE YEAR OF THE GIANT OIL SPILL IN THE SANTA BARBARA CHANNEL.

"THERE IS SO MUCH OIL OUT THERE THAT IT'S INCREDIBLE," SAID CLAIRE DEDRICK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE LANDS COMMISSION WHICH WOULD CONDUCT THE LEASE SALE.

CONSERVATIONISTS OPPOSE OFFSHORE DRILLING BECAUSE OF THE UNSIGHTLY OIL RIGS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF OIL SPILLS THAT COULD SOIL BEACHES AND KILL WILDLIFE.

TEXACO U.S.A. WEDNESDAY CONFIRMED THE EXISTENCE OF A GIANT NEW OIL DISCOVERY IN THE SANTA MARIA BASIN, FORMERLY CALLED THE HUESO AREA.

SIMILAR ANNOUNCEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE IN RECENT DAYS BY STANDARD OIL CO. OF CALIFORNIA AND PHILLIPS PETROLEUM. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE AMERICAN PETROLEUM INSTITUTE SAID THE DISCOVERY COULD BE THE BIGGEST FOR THE UNITED STATES SINCE THAT OF THE PRUDHOE BAY FIELD ON THE ARCTIC SLOPE OF ALASKA.

THE CALSO-PHILLIPS DISCOVERY WAS IN THE POINT ARGUELLO FIELD, 65 MILES FROM SANTA BARBARA. THE TEXACO TRACT IS WEST OF THE POINT ARGUELLO DISCOVERY.

TEXACO'S CONFIRMATION WELL NO. 3 TESTED AT INDIVIDUAL RATES OF UP TO 1,900 BARRELS A DAY. THE WELL WAS DRILLED TO A TOTAL DEPTH OF 8,500 FEET IN 1,043 FEET OF WATER.

TEXACO SAID A 48-SLOT PLATFORM CURRENTLY IS BEING DESIGNED BY BROWN & ROOT INC. FOR EVENTUAL PRODUCTION IN THIS NEW FIELD OF UP TO 50,000 BARRELS OF OIL DAILY. IT COULD BE INSTALLED BY LATE 1985.

UPI 11-18-82 03:13 PES

Los Angeles Times Sunday, June 20, 1982

5 Years Later: Few Scars From Alaskan Pipeline

Environmentalists' Fears of Damage to State's Permafrost, Wildlife Appear to Be Unfounded

By BILL CURRY, *Times Staff Writer*

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—It was the environmental battle of the '70s.

A group of oil companies wanted to run a pipeline carrying hot oil under and over some of the most beautiful and most hostile land in the United States. It would traverse 789 miles of Alaska from the oil-rich Arctic tundra to the proposed supertanker oil port on the salmon-rich waters of Prince William Sound.

Environmentalists fought bitterly, in Congress and the courts. They feared the impact of the pipeline on the land and on caribou herds, the effect of oil spills on marine life. They opposed the industrial invasion of the spectacular wilderness, the loss of wildlife habitat as it had existed for centuries.

Nonetheless, in the midst of an Arab oil embargo, the pipeline was approved by Congress, and over the next three years it was built.

Today marks the fifth anniversary of oil flowing through that Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, and, at this point, it can be said that the pipeline has dramatically changed virtually everything about Alaska—except the environment.

Impact 'Minimal'

"After all is said and done," said Arlan Kohl, pipeline project manager for the federal agency watching over it, "the tremendous project that it is—there's really minimal environmental impact."

That is also the consensus of a number of state and federal officials and others interviewed by The Times eight years after construction began and five years after the oil started flowing at 10:05 a.m. on June 20, 1977.

They say that:

—After carrying 2.4 billion barrels of oil, the pipeline has had no catastrophic effect on the fragile land it occupies.

—After 3,000 tanker operations to carry the oil to refineries in the Lower 48, there have been neither major oil spills nor harmful effects from small ones.

—After 31,403 acres of habitat were taken for construction, there has been no harmful displacement of wildlife.

And the officials give much of the credit for that to those who opposed the pipeline in the first place. The environmental outcry forced major design changes and stringent regulations of construction and operation.

"You have to remember," said Ernst W. Mueller, commissioner of Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation, "the pipeline that was built was not the pipeline that people complained about."

And Mueller added, "The pipeline, itself, as a tube bringing oil from one place to another, I don't think it's had that big an impact."

Speaking of the early environmental opposition, Richard H. Bishop, regional supervisor for the Alaska Division of Game here, said, "A lot of it was doomsday, totally unreal. But a lot of the objections were not, and it made a lot of difference in what probably would have happened otherwise."

Some of those interviewed cautioned that there may still be long-term environmental harm that is not yet apparent. Studies of the pipeline's effects continue to monitor everything from caribou herds on the north of the pipe to shellfish at the southern end.

"If you want to be optimistic," Bishop said, "you can say, 'It's worked.' But there's a long time to come yet."

And those watching the pipeline also warn that the advance of oil development beyond Prudhoe Bay, along the Beaufort Sea coast and inland toward the Brooks Range, may still produce a cumulative environmental harm not caused by the Prudhoe activity and the pipeline alone.

"If things stopped right there in terms of development," said Raymond D. Cameron, a state game biologist studying the pipeline's effect on caribou, "I'm almost reluctant to say it, (but) the result would appear to be not catastrophic."

So, whatever the reservations about the future, there is a generally favorable assessment of the $8-billion pipeline, the most expensive privately financed construction project in history. The pipeline's construction created an economic boom for Alaska and the oil has sustained the boom ever since.

Anchorage and Fairbanks have grown on it, Alaska has eliminated income taxes because of it, and it has made possible $1,000 state payments to virtually every man, woman and child living in the state. Those checks went into the mail just last week.

Today, the pipeline carries 17% of the nation's oil—1.591 billion barrels a day—from the North Slope to Valdez. The Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., which is owned by eight oil companies and operates the pipeline, said that, while there was short-term environmental damage from construction, "nothing now indicates a long-term impact."

That might not have been so, given the original Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) proposal.

"At the outset," historians Claus M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick write in their history of Alaska, "TAPS had no idea how to build a pipeline in a region where temperatures fluctuated from 60 degrees below zero to 100 degrees above. TAPS was not only going to build a pipeline quickly, but (they were planning to) build it exactly as if it were located in Texas.

"They planned to weld it together, bury it, turn on the taps and forget it. Vociferous objections from environmentalists and the sharp criticism of state and federal officials eventually forced Alyeska to design and build a line superior to any built before."

Perhaps the biggest change was made to protect Alaska's fragile permafrost, a permanently frozen surface of earth and ice crystals that, once destroyed or melted, is ruined virtually forever. The pipeline was originally to be buried for almost its entire length although the effects of its 160-degree cargo on permafrost were unknown.

Today, however, most of the pipeline is above ground. There have still been some problems. In June, 1979, melting ice near Atigun Pass caused an underground section of the pipe to settle, and a five-inch Z-shaped crack allowed an estimated 5,062 barrels of oil to leak out of the pipe for two to four days before it was discovered.

"If they had buried as much of the pipe as they wanted to," said Kohl, of the Interior Department's Office of Special Projects, "we'd be having Atigun passes all over."

1978 Sabotage Explosion

That was but one of a handful of spills along the pipeline. In fact, there have been more spill problems on land than at the oil port in Valdez, Mueller said. The worst was the still-unsolved sabotage incident of Feb. 15, 1978, when an explosive charge left a hole in the pipeline near here—and an oil spill of 550,000 gallons.

But officials said the damage from these spills is healing and vegetation is returning. Part of one spill last year, however, was left alone because cleanup would have caused even more damage.

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(The pipeline's most serious industrial accident since the oil began to flow came on July 8, 1977, when one worker was killed and five were injured in an explosion at a pumping station.)

There have been other problems as well, but none has yet exacted a toll on fish and wildlife populations. Localized erosion has occurred. Bears have been removed or killed as a threat to humans working along the pipeline, and the number of stunning natural vistas in the wilderness have been diminished. That loss is still mourned by such pipeline opponents as the Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C. "We have always recognized the aesthetic intrusion created by such industrial complexes and have consistently emphasized the serious environmental damage posed by such facilities," the society said.

And the possibility of an accidental oil spill of major proportions always remains. One tanker, in fact, drifted fully loaded and without power for 16½ hours and for 30 miles in Prince William Sound in January, 1980. It regained power 1.4 miles from a shoal.

"There are problems," Kohl said. "Not everything is rosy."

"But you'd really have to say there hasn't been anything drastic," added Jeff L. Mach, an environmental field officer with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. "I don't think you can say the big significant environmental impacts—oil spewing everywhere—have happened."

One potentially damaging effect has been on caribou herds, a major concern when the pipeline was proposed.

Shifting of Caribou

Despite rosy photographs in oil company ads of caribou foraging under the pipeline, caribou calves and their mothers, Cameron found, are indeed scared off by the pipeline and the activity associated with it, although adult bulls are apparently not deterred.

Cameron said the long-term significance of that on the numbers and productivity of the central Arctic caribou herd is unknown. For now, he said, other habitat is available to them.

"They're being pushed into habitat that's not preferred," Cameron said, "but which may not be worse. Their options have been decreased, but the options that remain would appear adequate."

"The intensive oil field development really concerns us," he said of the search for oil as it moves out from Prudhoe Bay fields. "It has the potential for the removal of vast amounts of valuable habitat."

That could interfere with the migration of two more large herds of caribou—with as yet unknown effects. "It's the continual accretion of development, this whole development on the coast with more activity and more things to obstruct the caribou," said David R. Klein, director of the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit of the University of Alaska here.

"What are the long-term effects of this? We don't really know."

Bishop, the regional game supervisor, warned that "there's still quite a few people that use those animals a lot for food and other materials. All across the Arctic slope those (native) communities use caribou. . . .

"You lose a chunk of habitat, and the chunk gets bigger, and then the question is whether (what is left) is big enough and good enough. The whole thing—the pipeline and oil development—is a 30-year-or-more experiment. There's no precedent to look to to know how it's going to turn out."

PERISCOPE

'No' for the Northern Tier Pipeline

Despite the determination of the Northern Tier Pipeline Co. to build a transcontinental oil pipeline from Washington to Michigan, insiders say the project is dead. Officials of Getty Oil, which controls the enterprise, met last week with Washington Gov. John Spellman and offered to post a $200 million indemnity bond to cover cleanup costs in the event of an accident. But Spellman refused to drop his adamant opposition to having the oil line tunnel under Puget Sound. The only hope left for the $2 billion energy project is Federal intervention to overrule Spellman, which is considered unlikely.

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BP Canada

(Continued from preceding page)

the deal of up to $1.5 billion. CP apparently does not want to take the frontier acreage immediately, out of worry that its Canadian Ownership Rate may be lower than 65 percent and that therefore it may not qualify for the maximum exploration grants offered by the Ottawa government. But one source said that PanCanadian may ultimately take an interest in these frontier properties by forming a joint venture with a Canadian company—possibly Panarctic Oils Ltd, in which PanCanadian and another CP subsidiary together hold 15 percent. The new joint venture company would then farm in on the former BP acreage. □

DOE May Survive

(Continued from preceding page)

abolishing DOE. But that may have changed. According to a growing body of informed opinion, Edwards won't use the sunset provision in that law to propose either DOE's outright abolition or even dismemberment of departmental programs.

The word "dismemberment," says an Edwards aide, has myriad meanings. Only the Economic Regulatory Administration—which even the Carter Administration was thinking of abolishing—is in real danger of death. "When you think about it candidly," says an Edwards aide, "you need some entity to manage the defense nuclear program, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and long-term research and development. Why not let DOE, or something like it, take care of it?"

Edwards prides himself on being a "team player" who enjoys sharing power with the far more flamboyant Interior Secretary James Watt, who chairs the Natural Resource and Environment Cabinet Council. "You'd be surpised how well the two Jims get along," one of Edwards closest aides reports.

But in recent weeks, Edwards has become more assertive about his own policymaking role. He has sought to carve a niche for himself in orchestrating the Cabinet council's decision on natural gas decontrol.

Having to defer nearly all important decisions to the Cabinet council has become a sore point for some of Edwards' staff. Public affairs staffers were told a few weeks ago not to answer inquiries about matters before the council. "The problem," says one of those staffers, "is that nearly every issue of importance is before the Cabinet council."

In recent weeks there have numerous indications that Edwards not only wants to preserve DOE but also may want to stay at its helm. He hasn't ruled out running for governor of South Carolina in 1982. But it would be tough race against incumbent Democratic Gov. Richard Riley; polls indicate that Edwards would lose were the election held now.

Observers both in and out of DOE say there is increasing evidence that Edwards aides have "decided to marry the natives." Morale now is low because of Reduction In Force notices expected to go out to a large number of employees in the next few weeks. But, says an Edwards aide, "the people on the seventh floor [where the executive suite is located] are getting more and more involved in the nitty-gritty of all the tough, nasty issues that have been around for a long time and which don't appear likely to go away. They act like they're in it for the long haul."

—Roger Gale

Oil Is Tasty To Ocean Bacteria, Says Scientist

Eating oil may be good for the health of the tiny bacterial colonies that inhabit the ocean bottom. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory marine biologist Robert Spies says he has evidence that more ocean animals live in the ocean bottom surrounding the Isla Vista oil seep, near Santa Barbara, Calif., than live in less polluted stretches nearby. The seep discharges 50-75 barrels of oil to the surface daily and is one of about 2,000 such natural oil leaks in the Coal Oil Point area off the Santa Barbara shore.

There is evidence, Spies says, that bacterial colonies actually digest petroleum and that some bacteria may even oxidize hydrogen sulfide gas bubbles. Although his five-year study focused on ocean bottom life, Spies is convinced that more worms, starfish, crabs and fish also live around the Isla Vista seep hole than in non-contaminated water a mile away.

Spies' study, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, concludes that fish feeding on the oil-laden bacteria and marine worms often show high levels of a mixed function oxidase enzyme that chemically breaks down the toxicity in petroleum. "We've discovered that most marine animals possess this enzyme," Spies asserts, "but it must be turned on by the presence of oil or similar complex hydrocarbons."

The scientist cautions that while marine life may be able to digest petroleum, its toxicity may have other detrimental effects, such as on starfish reproduction.

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