

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 BACKGROUND

In June of 1997, the County applied to the State Resources Agency for funding from the Coastal Resources Grant Program (AB 1431) to conduct the North County Oil and Gas Facility Siting Study and Planning Analysis (North County Siting Study). Aera Energy LLC, the company that holds the majority of the undeveloped offshore leases addressed by the study, provided the necessary 10% matching funds. The County proposed this study in order to comprehensively examine planning issues in advance of potential applications for onshore facilities necessary to develop the existing undeveloped federal leases in the Santa Maria Basin. The County's intent in pursuing this grant and study is further described in section 2.0, Introduction. In March 1998 the State Resources Agency awarded a grant to the County for this work. Since that time, staff has worked to identify the many technical, siting, planning, and policy issues related to the potential for new onshore development related to the offshore leases.

It is not known whether the undeveloped leases addressed by this study will actually be developed. The federal government could terminate the undeveloped leases offshore of northern and western Santa Barbara County, either through a lease buyback program or through lease expiration. In either of these cases, no additional offshore oil and gas development would occur, and the question of where associated onshore facilities could best be sited would become moot.

1.2 STUDY PROCESS AND REPORT CONTENTS

The first steps of the analysis involved collecting information on potential future oil and gas development and existing oil and gas infrastructure. The information on potential future development offshore and onshore is included in Section 3.0. Existing oil and gas industry infrastructure within the Study Area is discussed in Section 4.0. As a next step, maps were prepared to identify areas constrained by slopes, geologic hazards, hydrology, agricultural resources, and biological resources. These constraints and other unmapped environmental and land use constraints within the Study Area are discussed in Sections 5.0 through 5.11. Where available, the mapped database for each constraint is also included within these sections.

Once a full set of constraint information was assembled, analysis of the Study Area began to identify sites which might be the least constrained with respect to future oil and gas development. The siting analysis is contained in Section 6.0 of this document. A general set of siting criteria for future oil and gas facilities was developed. Composite constraint maps, which incorporate all mapped factors, were developed to identify potential areas where the impacts of any future oil and gas development might be minimized. Twenty-three preliminary sites were selected by reviewing these maps. The original set of potential sites was scaled down to five as a result of reviewing unmapped constraints (i.e. risk, air quality, and unmapped biological resources such as oak woodlands) and conducting site visits canvassing the rural portions of the Study Area. Potential transportation corridors are developed and briefly discussed for each of these sites. Section 7.0 of the document contains the conclusions and recommendations derived from the study, including recommendations for follow-on implementation.

1.3 CONCLUSIONS

The study addresses different scenarios of how offshore production could be processed onshore. The scenarios incorporate different assumptions regarding which leases would be processed at existing facilities on the County's South Coast. The preferred scenario identified in the study directs production from federal leases in the southern Santa Maria Basin (including Sword and Bonito) to the County's South Coast. Referencing the Pt. Arguello Project R-1 EIR, the study concludes that the existing facility and consolidation site in Las Flores Canyon appears to be environmentally preferred for processing production from these leases.

The study utilizes information from the Minerals Management Service regarding the physical properties of the crude oil in the Santa Maria Basin. This information suggests that either a new facility would have to be constructed, or the Lompoc Oil and Gas Plant would have to undergo substantial modification to process the oil from the northern fields, due to the heavy nature and high metal content of the oil. This study analyzes the potential for expansion of the Lompoc Oil and Gas Plant versus siting a new facility in a less constrained location.

The Site Analysis section of the document compares the merits and flaws of both the existing and the candidate oil and gas sites. Due to the potential for new offshore production to occur for a period that could exceed 25 years, the study concludes that the benefits of siting a new facility in a less constrained location outweigh the negative aspects of constructing a new facility. The five potential sites identified in the study, listed in order of environmental preference, are Casmalia East, Casmalia West, Cat Canyon North, Cat Canyon South, and Miguelito.

North County Siting Study

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