

Clovis OKs expansion of research park

Plan adds 153 acres; residents fear traffic, lower property values.

By Marc Benjamin / The Fresno Bee

Monday, Oct. 19, 2009

Clovis Research and Technology Park will nearly double in size over the next several years after Clovis City Council members approved plans for the project Monday night.

City Council members approved an environmental report and a general-plan change that will add 153 acres to the project, which is just north of Highway 168 and Temperance Avenue.

The research and technology park is now 180 acres and includes such companies as Precision Plastics, APPL Inc., the engineering firm of Provost & Pritchard and Cargo Bay, a privately operated business incubator.

Under the proposal, the project will extend eastward to Nees Avenue in a thin strip of land north of Highway 168.

In addition to the technology and business uses, the new portion of the park will have zoning for trails, hotels and some live-work residences to reduce the project's traffic and [air-quality effects](#).

The project will allow the city to have more land available for technology and light industrial uses and increase the number of high-paying jobs in the city to improve the city's jobs-housing balance, a measurement of the number of jobs in the city compared with the employed population.

Some residents in the area are concerned that the project will reduce their property values.

Others were concerned about noise from traffic and the street patterns, especially the route for Alluvial Avenue as it meanders from Temperance Avenue east toward the future Nees Avenue exit from Highway 168.

It could take decades to develop the land, up to 50 years, said City Manager Kathy Millison.

By creating a master plan now, Mayor Harry Armstrong said, the city will be ready when the economy turns around.

He compared the planning of the technology park to the planning 30 years ago of Clovis Community Medical Center, which is only now growing into its property.

He also said that the acquisition of the business park where Pelco is housed occurred 35 years ago.

"It's a problem you have when you move into a rural area," he said.

Residents also were concerned that the city is dedicating too much land to future business uses because only 14% of the first 180 acres of the technology park is occupied.

"I don't think any of us is saying no to this vision," said resident Ian Pattie.

"All we are saying ... is this the right time?"

Resident Pam Schmitz also spoke against the expansion. She said the changes should wait until businesses show interest in the area.

"To approve the change ... at this time seems extremely premature and unrealistic," she said.

Boggs Tract brainstorming moves forward

Transportation officials meet with neighbors

By Zachary K. Johnson, Record Staff Writer

Stockton Record, Monday, October 19, 2009

STOCKTON - As the final children on the George Washington Elementary School campus in Boggs Tract went home Thursday evening, they were replaced by their parents and adult neighbors filing into the cafeteria to learn more about a nearly \$200 million project to build a freeway in their neighborhood.

It is meant to give big rigs a straight shot from the Crosstown Freeway to Navy Drive and the Port of Stockton, taking trucks off the residential streets around the school and improving [air quality](#).

But the towering overpass needs land, and the property below is occupied by residents and businesses. Funded with \$97 million from a transportation bond approved by state voters in 2006 and a matching \$97 million from the county's own voter-approved half-cent sales tax, Measure K, the project is still in the planning stages.

So transportation officials were taking notes on what the neighbors had to say.

"Is it going to help us or hinder us?" asked Laverne Mitchell, who lives on Merced Avenue. She said the trucks are a menace - she recounted how a pebble spit backward from a passing big rig struck her infant granddaughter in her stroller during a neighborhood walk - but she's also concerned about the longtime residents who will lose their homes to make way for the project. "These people have roots dug deep."

Charlie Toledo, who owns a business on Navy Drive, said it looks like a good project, but it appears the current route would make it more difficult to load trucks at his business.

Officials and consultants on hand to answer questions told residents nothing was set in stone. "This is all preliminary engineering," said Scott Guidi, California Department of Transportation District 10 project manager.

Simulated photographs showed two major styles of freeway: One had an overpass on stilts, and the other put the freeway atop solid walls.

Pablo Cornejo, who lives on West Sonora Street, walked through the gallery of potential profiles. He liked the wall, he said. "I can live with this. I'm happy."

The public has until Nov. 15 to let officials know what does and does not make them happy in time for it to be most useful, officials said. The plan is to have an environmental document in place by summer, and construction is to begin in the summer of 2013. Partners in the project are Caltrans, the San Joaquin Council of Governments, Stockton and San Joaquin County.

"It would be good if we could do some kind of park there," Stockton City Councilwoman Susan Eggman said. It's also important to consider preserving the economic viability of the Port of Stockton, she said.

Better port access can attract jobs, but residents' concerns are important, too, said Carlos Villapudua, a member of the county Board of Supervisors. "I'm trying to look at both sides."

The freeway extension would be a definite selling point, said Jeff Kaspar, deputy director of the Port of Stockton.

"Access, egress and ease to the freeway are absolutely critical to industrial developers," he said. "The flow would be much, much easier to direct."

Despite the process, the coming change appears inevitable, said Tina Corral of Merced Avenue. "No matter what they say, they're going to continue doing this."

Forest study sees upside of climate change

Warmer temperatures may spur tree growth in some regions of the Pacific Northwest, which could mean reduced carbon in the air, researchers say.

By Kim Murphy, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2009

Reporting from Seattle - While gradually warming global temperatures long have been seen as an environmental threat, a study released Monday suggested that the forests of the Pacific Northwest could see a substantial gain in productivity as the thermometer climbs.

The bulk of the gains from climate change will be seen at higher elevations -- above 3,000 feet -- and in forests east of the Cascade Mountains, according to researchers at Oregon State University. Lower-elevation forests, where most of the commercial timber is harvested, could see reduced growth as a result of drier conditions.

The study, published in the journal *Forest Ecology and Management*, is one of the first to look at a variety of climate change models and predict what might happen to the signature forests that are an economic and ecological mainstay of the West as the climate warms.

Already, researchers have found detrimental effects from pest and disease infestation as a result of warmer temperatures that have begun killing off trees such as aspens, white bark pines and Douglas fir.

But a warmer climate also could have a positive effect if, for example, more tree growth reduced the amount of carbon in the air, said Greg Latta, the lead researcher on the study.

"Certainly, if you're putting more cubic meters of wood on an acre each year, that's more carbon out of the atmosphere. That's a good thing," he said.

On the other hand, he said, the addition of more biomass in the forests could mean more fuel for fires.

Researchers didn't take into account the potential effects of fire or pests, which do not tend to die off as readily with warmer temperatures, he said.

The study -- conducted along with the U.S. Forest Service -- found that potential effects would be greatest in Washington, where high-elevation forests could see growth increase from 35% a year to as much as 500%, depending on the climate scenario.

Oregon's high-level forests might see gains of 9% to 75%.

Even with expected declines of 1% to 3% a year in forest productivity at lower elevations, overall productivity could increase about 7% a year in forests west of the Cascades and 20% to the east, the study found.

"There's a lot of variability here, depending on which climate scenario turns out to be most accurate and what policy changes are made as a result," Darius Adams, professor of forest economics at Oregon State, said in a statement.

"Clearly the forest growth is likely to increase the most at higher elevations, but it's worth noting that those forests never had very high growth rates to start with."

Report looks at hidden health costs of energy production

By Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers

Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Monday, October 19, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Generating electricity by burning coal is responsible for about half of an estimated \$120 billion in yearly costs from early deaths and health damages to thousands of Americans from the use of fossil fuels, a federal advisory group said Monday.

A one-year study by the National Research Council looked at many costs of energy production and the use of fossil fuels that aren't reflected in the price of energy. The \$120 billion sum was the cost to human health from U.S. electricity production, transportation and heating in 2005, the latest year with full data.

The report also looks at other hidden costs from climate change, hazardous air pollutants such as mercury, harm to ecosystems and risks to national security, but it doesn't put a dollar value on them.

"We would characterize our estimate as an underestimate," because it didn't include those other costs, said Jared Cohon, the president of Carnegie Mellon University and the chairman of the committee that produced the report.

The report says it's impossible to put a monetary amount on all the hidden costs of energy, in some cases because of a lack of information but also because the study had limited time and resources. It focused on the costs of air pollution on health.

Coal-fired power and motor-vehicle transportation accounted for roughly 99 percent of those costs. The other approximately 1 percent of the estimate was from heating for homes, buildings and industrial purposes, mostly from natural gas.

Electricity production accounted for \$63 billion of the damages that weren't related to climate change. Coal-fired plants, which produce about half of the nation's electricity, accounted for \$62 billion and natural gas, which produces 20 percent, produced less than \$1 billion of the damages.

The report looks at the sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and particulate emissions from 406 coal-fired plants in the Lower 48 states, which produce 95 percent of the nation's coal-generated electricity. There were

wide differences among plants in the amount of pollution each produced. The estimated health damages ranged from less than half a cent per kilowatt hour to more than 12 cents. The average was 3.2 cents per kilowatt hour.

The best use of the information is to compare it on a plant-by-plant basis with the cost of installing and running scrubbers to reduce the pollution, said Maureen Cropper, a professor of economics at the University of Maryland and the vice chairman of the 19-member report committee.

"There are plants that are very clean out there, and the cost of further controls would not be worth the benefits and you wouldn't want to do anything," she said. However, there are also dirtier plants where the health benefits would outweigh the cost of pollution controls.

The report says nuclear energy produces low damages under normal conditions but that the nuclear waste issue needs more study before any estimate can be made. Wind and solar also produce low damages, but more study will be needed as they expand, it says. For example, if solar becomes a large energy source, future studies should look at the pollution damages from manufacturing, recycling and disposing of solar equipment.

The panel looked at transportation by motor vehicles, which make up 75 percent of transportation energy use, but it didn't monetize the pollution damages from air, rail or water transportation. It estimated the pollution damages from motor-vehicle transportation at \$56 billion in 2005.

The dollar amounts were mainly early deaths due to pollution, with the value of each life put at \$6 million, consistent with other studies. More than 90 percent of the costs were the statistical cost of early deaths. Other costs in studies the panel examined included chronic bronchitis and asthma, Cropper said.

Total early deaths were about 18,000 to 19,000 per year, said another member of the panel, Daniel Greenbaum, the president of the Health Effects Institute in Boston, a nonprofit organization that researches the effects of air pollution on health.

The report notes that there can be large uncertainties in its estimates. The panel of scientists, engineers, economists, and law and policy experts based its findings on presentations by experts, peer-reviewed scientific literature, and federal reports and databases.

On climate change, the panel found a wide range of estimates, from \$1 to \$100 per ton of greenhouse gases. Cohon said the range was large because the amounts depended on two variables: the relationship one assumes between increased temperature from climate change and the damages that will result; and the "discount rate," or the rate used to put future damages in present values.

The National Research Council of the National Academies is the federal government's top adviser on science and technology. The National Academies are made up of prominent scholars engaged in research in science, medicine and engineering.

Study tallies environmental, human cost of using fossil fuels

By Matthew L. Wald, New York Times News Service
San Diego Union-Tribune, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

WASHINGTON — Burning fossil fuels costs the United States about \$120 billion a year in health costs, mostly because of thousands of premature deaths from air pollution, the National Academy of Sciences reported in a study issued yesterday.

The damages are caused almost equally by coal and oil, according to the study, which was ordered by Congress. The study set out to measure the costs not incorporated into the price of a kilowatt-hour or a gallon of gasoline or diesel fuel.

The estimates do not include damage from global warming, which has been linked to the gases produced by burning fossil fuels. The authors said the extent of such damage and the timing were too uncertain to estimate.

The study did not measure damage from burning oil for trains, ships and planes, or the environmental damage from coal mining or the pollution of rivers with chemicals that were filtered from coal-plant smokestacks to keep the air clean.

"The largest portion of this is excess mortality — increased human deaths as a result of criteria air pollutants emitted by power plants and vehicles," said Jared Cohon, president of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, who led the study committee.

Nearly 20,000 people die prematurely each year from such causes, according to the study's authors, who valued each life at \$6 million based on the dollar in 2000. Those pollutants include small soot particles, which cause lung damage; nitrogen oxides, which contribute to smog; and sulfur dioxide, which causes acid rain.

The study lends support to arguments that society should pay extra for energy from sources like the wind and the sun, because their indirect costs are extremely small. But it also found that renewable motor fuel, in the form of ethanol from corn, was slightly worse than gasoline in its environmental impact.

Coal burning was the biggest single source of such external costs. The damages averaged 3.2 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared with 0.16 cents for gas. But the variation among coal plants was enormous.

The worst plants, generally the oldest and burning coal with the highest sulfur content, were 3.6 times worse than the average, with a cost of nearly 12 cents per kilowatt-hour (which is more than the average retail price of that amount of electricity).

The best plants carried a cost of less than a quarter of a penny. Natural gas plants also showed a large variation, but both the best and the worst costs were far smaller than for coal.

Such variation suggests that existing technology could be applied to make the electric system much cleaner, experts said. One of the study's authors, Maureen Cropper, an economist at the University of Maryland, said the findings should be used not to raise the price of electricity based on an average of indirect costs but to measure the cost of cleanup on a plant-by-plant basis.

The study did not measure damage from pollution-control devices. "If you're taking the output of a scrubber and dumping it in the Monongahela River, that's not in our study," Cropper said.

The study found that operating nuclear plants did not impose significant environmental costs, though uranium mining and processing did. But 95 percent of uranium mining takes place in other countries, the study said. Canada and Australia together account for 44 percent of world production.

The committee did not put a dollar value on the risk of a nuclear accident that would produce environmental damage. It also noted the uncertainty of the cost of long-term disposal of high-level wastes.

The committee said environmental damage from gasoline and diesel fuel cost 1.2 cents to 1.7 cents per mile. A co-author of the study, Daniel Greenbaum, president of the Health Effects Institute, said that would come to 23 cents to 38 cents per gallon. Still, Greenbaum said, "we were hesitant to make that a central part of our findings" because pollution also results from manufacturing cars.

The study did not calculate the military cost of protecting fuel imports.

As for wind energy, the study said it killed birds but not enough to seriously affect populations. A possible exception was raptors, birds of prey that ordinarily eat species whose numbers are being reduced by spinning turbine blades.

The study was not kind to ethanol. A mixture of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent unleaded gasoline, or E85, showed slightly higher damages to environment and health than ordinary gasoline, because of the energy required to raise the corn and make ethanol from it.

Electric vehicles and vehicles using synthetic diesel fuel also ranked poorly. The electric vehicles might do better if emissions of heat-trapping gases had been factored in, because they have lower carbon dioxide emissions per mile than gasoline-powered cars. But the cars running on artificial diesel would look slightly worse in that analysis, the study said.

Cardin says bill would prod states to clean up Chesapeake

By David A. Fahrenthold, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.) said Monday that he will introduce legislation to punish states that lag in cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, adding a regulatory hammer to a process that has let several deadlines slide by.

Cardin announced the bill in a news conference along the bay shore near Annapolis, saying later that the bill would be the most important new policy for the Chesapeake in 25 years. In that time, governments have spent billions on the bay but have not significantly improved its health.

"It puts teeth in the goals for cleaning up the bay," Cardin said. "If this bill was passed and funded, I think I would be very confident . . . we would really make significant progress."

The ideas in Cardin's bill are similar to those in the Obama administration's plans for the Chesapeake, announced last month.

Both aim to make the bay a national laboratory for cleaning up pollution, by attacking water contaminants with the same legal tools that have helped clean the nation's air.

Specifically, the proposals borrow a legal framework from the Clean Air Act, which requires state and local governments with too-smoggy air to file plans for reducing pollution. If the Environmental Protection Agency judges the plans to be inadequate, the governments must revise them or face a threat of losing some federal funds.

Under Cardin's bill, computer models would be used to figure out how much pollution needs to be cut to restore the Chesapeake's health. Those reductions would be parceled out to states, which would have to file plans for meeting their goals, two years at a time.

If the goals aren't met, the states could lose EPA funding for projects or have the EPA take over some of their environmental duties.

Cardin's bill calls for all the measures to be in place by 2025. It authorizes \$2 billion in new spending, to be distributed among the bay watershed states of Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York, as well as the District.

The bill was applauded by environmental groups Monday. But Valerie Connelly of the Maryland Farm Bureau said her group worries that it would place burdensome regulations on farms.

"We're worried about the impact on small and medium farms," Connelly said. "And we're just not sure there's enough resources out there" to help them clean up, she added.

Cardin unveils federal Chesapeake Restoration bill

By Alex Dominguez, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

ANNAPOLIS, Md.—Federal legislation to restore the Chesapeake Bay will create funding and incentives and mandate enforcement penalties if states don't meet restoration goals, Sen. Ben Cardin said Monday.

"This is a major moment," said Cardin, the bill's co-sponsor, as he outlined the measure on a sunny, blustery day on the shores of the bay at Sandy Point State Park.

The Maryland Democrat called the legislation the most significant advance for the Chesapeake Bay in the past 25 years. That drew agreement from the head of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, which has sued the federal Environmental Protection Agency over the slow pace of cleanup efforts.

Foundation president Will Baker said the environmental group would look closely at the language of the bill and track the progress of restoration efforts, but he said foundation officials were pleased overall.

Baker said the proposed bill "requires that actions replace words," and called it the most important bay legislation in the group's history.

Cardin, who is co-sponsoring the bill with fellow Maryland Sen. Barbara Mikulski on the bill, said it will give states and local governments new enforcement tools and create a cap-and-trade pollution trading program designed to lower compliance costs and provide incentives for farmers.

The bill comes as the EPA is also drafting a bay restoration strategy in response to an executive order by President Barack Obama earlier this year. Obama's executive order puts the federal government at the head of efforts previously led by the states. Cardin said the legislation reauthorizing the decades old Chesapeake Bay Program codifies Obama's order.

The bill would establish a new \$1.5 billion grant program for urban and suburban stormwater control, and a 2025 deadline as well as two-year reporting requirements beginning in 2014 to make sure goals are being met. It also would require the EPA to develop a cap-and-trade program designed to provide incentives for lowering phosphorous and nitrogen pollution.

L. Preston Bryant Jr., Virginia's Secretary of Natural Resources, called the legislation focused, fair and smart, adding Virginia's pollution trading program has been "wildly successful."

The bill would require the EPA to look at existing programs in Virginia and Pennsylvania in developing an interstate program, which could involve farmers and others who currently obtain permits for nitrogen and phosphorous runoff into the bay, said Mike Burke, a Cardin environmental aide who worked on the legislation.

"It's pretty much an open ball game," Burke said of possible participants, adding the legislation is silent on whether sources of nitrogen and phosphorous come from runoff of water or air pollution.

One of the advantages of the legislation is that it allows the public to devise ways to reduce runoff, the aide said.

"If you can demonstrate a reduction" in nitrogen or phosphorous "then you qualify," Burke said.

Cap-and-trade systems do not eliminate pollution entirely. Instead, they allow polluters to trade credits for reductions they have made. Baker said that is a concern, but cap-and-trade programs also are not designed to keep pollution at current levels.

"You can't trade at the status quo," Baker said. "You've got to be trading to get lower levels."

Luke Brubaker, a dairy and chicken farmer from Mount Joy, Pa., who participates in the Pennsylvania program, appeared at the event and asked the EPA to make any program user friendly and not interfere with current state programs he said are successful.

Brubaker said he felt an interstate cap-and-trade program "will open new financial incentives for best management practices."

Michigan limits mercury from coal-fired plants

By John Flesher, AP Environmental Writer

In the Washington Post, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Michigan's coal-fired power plants will be required to make drastic cuts in mercury emissions under regulations announced Monday.

The rules developed by the Department of Environmental Quality are designed to implement a policy Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced three years ago to slash the generators' mercury output 90 percent by 2015. Coal-fired plants produce 60 percent of Michigan's electricity.

"Mercury is a serious health concern, and Michigan is eager to see a major reduction in mercury air emissions," DEQ Director Steven Chester said.

A powerful toxin, mercury can damage the human nervous system and cause learning disabilities in fetuses and young children. Coal-fired electric plants are the nation's leading source of mercury pollution.

Mercury pumped into the atmosphere from their smokestacks can fall into waterways and convert to methylmercury, a form that moves up the food chain and accumulates in fish.

Michigan is the 19th state to regulate mercury emissions from coal-fired plants.

Not every plant will have to reduce emissions by 90 percent. But the regulations will require each company to cut overall emissions by 90 percent from their 1999 levels, which environmental groups said would reduce mercury pollution in the state by 3,600 pounds a year.

The rules give existing plants several options.

They can install equipment that will produce a direct 90 percent drop-off in mercury output. One such system injects carbon into gas produced by plants, isolating the mercury in ash that can be hauled to landfills.

Or companies can use advanced scrubbers that target other pollutants, such as nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide. Such devices have been found to also reduce mercury emissions by nearly three-quarters.

Small plants that don't emit much mercury will be allowed to try other methods that the DEQ will evaluate on a case-by-case basis.

New plants will have to use best-available technology to meet state standards.

DEQ crafted the rules with recommendations from a panel that included representatives from the industry and environmental groups.

Mike Shriberg, policy director of The Ecology Center and a member of the advisory panel, said the rules included loopholes that might cause the actual overall mercury reduction to be about 77 percent instead of 90 percent. Even so, he described them as a big improvement.

"This is a strong and long-overdue action that places Michigan among the leading states in reducing this potent toxic chemical," Shriberg said.

The requirements are "doable but challenging," said Lou Pocalujka, senior environmental planner for Consumers Energy and another advisory committee member.

"Our preference would be a single federal rule ... so absolutely everyone in the country would be on the same playing field," Pocalujka said.

The Obama administration pledged this year to craft regulations after a federal appeals court rejected plans written by the Bush administration and favored by industry.

The Bush rules would have allowed power plants to buy and sell pollution credits, instead of requiring each plant to install equipment to reduce mercury pollution.

DEQ spokesman Robert McCann said the new state rules were "achievable and cost-effective for the utilities to implement."

EPA: Indiana must rewrite BP refinery air permit

By Rick Callahan, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Washington Post and other papers, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

INDIANAPOLIS—Federal officials ordered Indiana on Monday to rewrite an air permit for BP PLC's Whiting refinery, concluding the state may not have fully assessed all the new emissions a big expansion of the refinery will produce.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision means Indiana has 90 days to conduct a new air emissions analysis and submit to EPA a revised air permit for the refinery, which is in the midst of \$3.8 billion expansion along Lake Michigan.

Members of the five environmental groups who petitioned the EPA in August 2008 to review the permit declared the agency's decision a victory for Indiana residents, particularly those who live near the refinery about 20 miles southeast of downtown Chicago.

"EPA recognizes what we've been telling BP and the state all along—this refinery expansion is clearly going to dump additional pollution on the surrounding communities, and the law requires BP to control it," said Ann Alexander, senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The EPA asked Indiana officials to re-examine, among other emission sources, the pollutants released by the project's flares, which are tall chimney-like structures that burn off waste substances. It also asked the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to analyze emissions from a variety of new equipment the refinery will use in its new role as a top processor of thicker, high-sulfur crude taken from Canadian tar sands.

When the EPA approved the project's previous air permit in 2008, it concluded the added emissions would not rise above a certain threshold that would require declaring those changes a "major modification."

Such a declaration would mean BP would have to install additional, potentially costly, pollution control devices or take other steps to reduce emissions and meet Clean Air Act requirements.

The EPA's order that Indiana regulators mount a new emissions analysis and answer its concerns in a revised permit raises the possibility that the project could be declared a "major modification," depending on IDEM's findings.

"It could change or it could remain the same. We don't know until the analysis is done," said Jay Bortzer, chief of the air programs branch of the EPA's Chicago office.

IDEM spokesman Robert Elstro said Monday the agency will use the next three months "to evaluate the available options and consider the appropriate response to the order."

The EPA's Monday order denied some of the environmental groups' claims, including concerns about the venting of uncontrolled pressure relief valves and added controls for greenhouse gas emissions.

BP says the refinery expansion is on pace to be finished in early 2012. The project will boost its production of gasoline, diesel fuel and jet fuel 15 percent to about 4.7 billion gallons a year.

Shell gets conditional OK for Beaufort drilling

By Dan Joling, Associated Press Writer

In the Tri-Valley Herald, Washington Post and other papers, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—A federal agency announced approval Monday of a plan by Shell Offshore, Inc.'s to drill exploratory wells next year on two leases in the Beaufort Sea off Alaska's north coast—a decision that environmental groups contend ignores threats to the Arctic environment and its wildlife.

The Minerals Management Service said Shell must meet certain conditions, including federal air and water quality rules and marine mammal protection requirements.

Shell Alaska vice president Pete Slaiby called it a positive step toward drilling next year.

"We sincerely believe this exploration plan addresses concerns we have heard in the North Slope Communities which have resulted in the programs being adjusted accordingly," he said in a prepared statement.

Environmental groups claim the Arctic and its marine mammals already are under stress from global warming and the loss of sea ice.

"Obama could have installed Sarah Palin as Secretary of Interior and the polar bear and Arctic ecosystem would be no worse off than it is under Ken Salazar," said Brendan Cummings, an attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, which successfully petitioned to list polar bears as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Shell obtained the two leases during sales in 2005 and 2007. The sales were included in the 2002-2007 five-year oil and gas leasing program and were not affected by a court decision on the current leasing program, which sent the 2007-2012 program back to MMS for additional analysis.

According to the agency, Shell's plans include a mid-drilling season break and removal of the drill ship to accommodate fall subsistence bowhead whaling by the Inupiat Eskimo villages of Kaktovik and Nuiqsut.

Operations would be suspended Aug. 25 and vessels would either move to the northwest during whale hunts or would leave the Beaufort Sea entirely. Drilling activity could be resumed after completion of the subsistence hunts possibly as late as Oct. 31, depending on ice and weather.

Drilling operations are planned using the Frontier Discoverer, a drill ship that MMS said has been retrofitted and ice-reinforced for operations in Arctic waters.

The two leases are about 16 and 23 miles north of Point Thompson.

The Beaufort Sea is estimated to contain 8.22 billion barrels of oil and 27.64 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, according to MMS.

Alaska's two U.S. senators praised the announcement. Republican Lisa Murkowski called it an encouraging sign that Alaska's oil and natural gas resources will continue to play a major role in America's energy security. Democrat Mark Begich said the decision showed that Interior Secretary Salazar and the Obama Administration recognize the importance of Alaska's abundant offshore oil and gas resources, including safeguards for important subsistence resources.

But Cummings of the Center for Biological Diversity said petroleum companies have not proved they can clean up a spill in Arctic conditions, especially broken ice. Boom and other measures used to contain oil in open water were ineffective in tests off Alaska's coast. Just getting equipment to a catastrophic spill in the Beaufort, which has few support facilities and some of the worst weather and light conditions in the world, would be challenging.

"Survival of the polar bear in the Beaufort Sea is already tenuous," Cummings said. "Any additional stress such as the noise disturbance from the drilling itself and the risk of a catastrophic spill takes us in a wrong direction."

Shell Alaska spokesman Curtis Smith said in an e-mail response to questions that the company will meet all requirements laid down by state and federal law.

"Shell has assembled the most environmentally sensitive and thoroughly responsible exploration plan in history," he said. "That includes a world-class oil spill response fleet that would be on-site 24/7 in the extremely unlikely event of a spill."

He said Shell and industry partners continue to make advances in spill prevention and response technology.

"Recent trials in Norway again substantiate the majority of oil spilled on ice-covered waters can be removed," he said.

David Dickson of the Alaska Wilderness League in Washington, D.C., said MMS has been premature and less than thorough in its environmental review.

Spokesmen for Oceana and Ocean Conservancy said MMS approved Shell's Beaufort plan despite a substantial and recognized lack of science or planning. The approval continues failed policies that led federal courts to invalidate the approval of the current five-year leasing program, the groups said.

8 South Asian nations resist binding emission cuts

By Ashok Sharma - Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Tuesday, October 20, 2009

NEW DELHI -- Eight South Asian countries have agreed they can't be part of any climate change deal that sets legally binding limits on their emissions, an Indian official said Tuesday.

India, Pakistan and six other nations will present a coordinated stance at a key global meeting in Copenhagen in December to stick with the Kyoto Protocol, agreed in 1997, Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said after a two-day meeting of regional environment ministers.

The Kyoto Protocol was the first global agreement requiring modest reductions in emissions by industrialized countries. The United States rejected it because it exempted such countries as India and China, both major polluters, from obligations.

The Copenhagen meeting aims at approving a new climate treaty. Developed countries, including the United States, want newly emerging economies to do their part in cutting emissions of such heat-trapping gases as carbon dioxide.

India, however, has previously said in blunt terms it won't accept legally binding limits on its emissions - a stance that could jeopardize efforts to reach a meaningful climate change accord.

"There is a consensus among South Asian nations that we should not budge from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol and the Bali declaration," Ramesh said.

Countries such as India, China, Brazil and Mexico have agreed to draw up programs to slow the growth of their greenhouse gas emissions, but they have resisted making those limits binding and subject to international monitoring.

Nissan in electric car batteries recycling venture

The Associated Press

in the Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Monday, October 19, 2009

TOKYO -- Nissan Motor Co. said it will set up a joint venture with a Japanese trading house for recycling of electric car batteries.

Nissan said Tuesday the joint venture with Sumitomo Corporation is expected to begin operations in late 2010 in Japan and the United States. The companies have yet to finalize details including the capitalization of the venture.

The launch is in line with a potential surge in demand for electric vehicles powered by batteries.

In August, Nissan rolled out its zero-emission vehicle, the Leaf, which will go into mass-production globally in 2012. The car uses a lithium-ion battery pack.

Nissan's Chief Executive Carlos Ghosn said Monday that global demand for electric cars will jump, forecasting such vehicles would account for 10 percent of the global auto market by 2020.

Nissan said Tuesday it was also considering a recycling business for electric car batteries in Europe with Renault SA of France, which owns a 44 percent stake in Japan's No. 3 car maker.

Sumitomo spokesman Kazuho Enaka said the venture aimed to recycle electric car batteries for energy storage for households and companies.

[USA Today blog, Monday, October 19, 2009:](#)

Report warns of energy pollution dangers

By Dan Vergano

Energy pollution prematurely kills at least 18,000 people every year and costs \$120 billion in unaccounted damages nationwide, finds a National Research Council (NRC) analysis released Monday, with billions more in climate damages also not reflected in electricity, gasoline and other fuel's prices.

"I would call this a conservative estimate," says report panel chairman Jared Cohon, president of Carnegie-Mellon University. Coal use for electricity -- with 10% of the dirtiest plants responsible for 43% of the costs -- account for about \$62 billion of yearly damages alone. The report based its findings on 2005, when it was first requested by Congress.

"The NAS report is newsworthy because it reminds us that air pollution is still a major problem in this country," says Yale economist Robert Mendelsohn, who reviewed the report. "Although everyone is talking about just greenhouse gases, several of the criteria pollutants that are bad for your health remain under regulated."

Depending on how much economists "discount" future environmental damages, U.S. greenhouse gas emissions of about 7,000 million metric tons a year, cause from \$7 billion to \$700 billion in unaccounted costs, suggests the study.

"There is no calculation of the health and welfare benefits of energy," skewing the report's costs, says Carol Raulston of the National Mining Association, by email, adding that regulations mean that pollutants will decline in the future. However Cohon says those benefits are already paid for by consumers.