

KEEP THE SESPE WILD & FREE

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

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MARCH 2015

KEEP THE SESPE FRACKING FREE!

KSWC's COMMENTS TO THE PUBLIC HEARING ON FRACKING IN THE SESPE OILFIELD, VENTURA COLLEGE, FEB. 10, 2015

The hearing was held by DOGGR, the California Dept. of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources, which has jurisdiction over our state's oil industry. The hearing topic was the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on Senate Bill 4 (SB 4), last year's California legislation requiring first-time-ever regulations on fracking within the state. The DEIR studied three oilfields within the state – one of them fortunately being the Sespe Oilfield in the hills north of Fillmore.

The DEIR concluded that impacts from oil and gas drilling in the Sespe Oilfield are “significant and unavoidable.”

“We support Alternative 1, which calls for no further fracking, for the Sespe Oilfield. The Sespe watershed is home to the federally-protected Condor Sanctuary, where captive-bred condors are released into the wild. It is also where the last wild condors were captured for the captive-breeding program at the Los Angeles Zoo.

31.5 miles of Sespe Creek, including most of the lower Sespe Gorge adjacent to the Sespe Oilfield, are part of the national Wild & Scenic Rivers system, which requires those waters' pristine nature to be protected.

The risk of harm to the condors, as well as to endangered species living in the waters of Sespe Creek, such as the southern steelhead and the arroyo toad, is too great if fracking continues to be permitted in oil wells in the Sespe Oilfield.

Well casings are notorious for deteriorating over time, and the lands between the Sespe Oilfield and Sespe Creek are littered with thousands of natural seeps where oil comes to the surface. It will not be possible to keep fracking chemicals away from waters used by condors for

drinking, or away from Sespe Creek and the steelhead and arroyo toads living there.

In a prime example of putting the cart before the horse, DOGGR's water quality study of fracking is to be released this summer, while DOGGR's regulations on fracking are to take effect on July 01, 2015. How can there be meaningful regulations this summer to protect our water supplies from pollution by fracking chemicals, when the only study ever to be performed in California on fracking and water quality is not even published?

The Sespe Oilfield DEIR states that there are 12 injection wells in that area, where 430,000 barrels of produced water (which includes fracking chemicals) are injected annually into underground aquifers. There has as yet been no published study to evaluate whether these injected fluids may be leaking out of deteriorating well casings as they are pumped with pressure underground.

Likewise there is no information as to whether these fluids may have moved away from the vicinity of the injection wells towards and/or into nearby aquifers used for drinking water.

All aquifers are connected to adjacent aquifers – water in underground basins flows “downstream” just as surface waters do. Downstream of the Sespe Oilfield are the waters of Sespe Creek and the aquifers beneath the community of Fillmore, to name only the closest.

We must contradict the testimony at the Ventura College DOGGR Hearing on SB4's DEIR, where multiple individuals and organizations representing the oil industry stated that there is no evidence of aquifer pollution from fracking chemicals, that the oil industry creates jobs, and that DOGGR must rely on science in its decision-making. (This last point alluded to the industry's public relations position that environmentalists' testimony is based on emotion rather than on science).

The very day of that hearing, California newspapers carried the story of hundreds of injection wells in the state that have been allowed to pump produced water, with high concentrations of

toxic chemicals from produced water and from fracking, into protected aquifers used for drinking and/or irrigation water. Benzene is one of those chemicals.

These reports were in fact based on science, not on emotion. And while the oil industry does a commendable job of creating employment opportunities, this does not give the oil industry carte blanche to pollute our drinking water supplies. No other industry has permission to pollute – why on earth should the oil industry be an exception?”

State legislators Fran Pavley and Das Williams are promising new legislation to rein in the industry, and to reshape DOGGR to focus on protecting public health and the environment, rather than on promoting energy development.

MORE INFO ON THE SESPE OILFIELD FROM THE SB4 DEIR

Seneca owns 236 of the 300 active oil wells there. 200 of those 300 wells are within Los Padres Forest, and 100 of those are on private inholdings.

The annual oilfield production is 438,000 barrels of oil, piped to refineries in Los Angeles and San Francisco. This is close to the number of barrels of produced water injected underground in the same oilfield annually.

700 million cubic feet of natural gas is also produced there each year. The average Seneca oil well is 5,923 feet deep.

Seneca also operates 12 injection wells in the Sespe Oilfield, at an average of 3,979 feet deep – where produced water (which comes up naturally mixed with the oil) and used fracking water are both injected back deep underground.

Seneca fracked 10 Sespe wells in the past 3 years. Future expectations are for 2 to 4 new wells being drilled a year, all of which would be fracked.

No new fracking of existing wells is expected in the next 20 years (because earlier fracking has helped those wells produce better for a long period of time). Water pumped underground to stimulate production there is recycled wastewater trucked in from Long Beach (up to 6.5 acre feet per year).

There was also some fascinating history of early oil exploration in Ventura County (search SB4 DEIR, go to vol. 2, page 266).

For those interested in detailed local geology, go to page 289.

UPDATE ON THE OIL INDUSTRY'S INJECTING TOXIC WATER INTO DRINKING WATER AQUIFERS.

DOGGR has failed to protect public health, stated John Laird, California's Natural Resources Secretary. Governor Brown last year appointed Steve Bohlen to head DOGGR; he was formerly with the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Laird said that Bohlen's "primary task is getting a hold on an agency that has not had clear direction in a very long time."

DOGGR had allowed oilfield wastewater to be injected into drinking water aquifers around 2,500 times, nearly half of that in the past four years. The federal Environmental Protection Agency last December gave DOGGR two months to plan how to stop this, and bring statewide oil operations into compliance with 1974's Safe Drinking Water Act. Included in DOGGR's new list of 532 injection wells of concern are 19 in Ventura County – five of them in the Sespe Oilfield.

Assemblyman Das Williams has introduced AB 356, which would give the State Water Board the authority to test oilfield wastewater injection wells. In Ventura County, the Board of Supervisors ordered a study of benzene in oilfield wastewater that is injected underground. The Los Angeles Times had reported on DOGGR data showing that benzene, a carcinogen, was present in injected oilfield wastewater at levels 700 times more concentrated than allowed under federal standards.

NEW FEDERAL FRACKING LAWS

The first ever federal fracking regulations, over four years in preparation, were unveiled by the EPA in mid-March. They only apply to wells on federal public lands that have not yet been fracked. Of around 100,000 oil wells on federal lands, about 90% have already been fracked – including the Sespe Oilfield's 200.

These new regulations will allow the testing of well casings (which often leak, especially on older wells), and they will require the disclosure of the fracking chemicals used. The above ground storage of used fracking fluids will also be regulated. Further federal fracking regulations are to follow, including restricting oilfield releases of methane, a very potent greenhouse gas.



Wading through the First Narrows pool in the Sespe Gorge. After several years of wading through this beautiful silted-up pool, there is once again the need to swim part of it, as is the case at Second Narrows further downstream.

PLEASE KEEP THOSE DONATIONS FLOWING IN TO KSWC!

Your donations pay for all our expenses at KSWC. We are not tax-deductible. Having no paid staff, we only have bills for printing and mailing the quarterly newsletter, for phone and online services, plus a number of smaller costs. All of these have to be covered by the support you send in to us. This newsletter goes out as a free subscription to over 1,000 people, and those that like what they read support the entire endeavor. Thanks as ever to all our regular donors.

TAR CREEK TRAIL CLOSURE IS BEING ENFORCED

U.S. Forest Service law enforcement staff from Ojai are now ticketing cars parked at the Tar Creek trailhead north of Fillmore. This trail is closed as it leads to lower Tar Creek, which has become incredibly popular for cliff jumping, in an area that is a roosting site for California condors, a federal endangered species. The tickets are, we believe, for \$150, for entering a closed area. The Forest cops go up there at a variety of different times of the week. By the way, we recently learned that Forest cops have full training and powers to enforce California laws – we saw a Forest patrol vehicle parked by Hwy. 150 with its occupant wielding a speed gun. Thought you should know.

FURTHER NEWS ON THOSE LAST CALIFORNIA GRIZZLY BEARS

In our last newsletter we ran the story of Monarch, a grizzly bear that was captured near Mt. Pinos and shipped off to the zoo in San Francisco in 1889, where he lived until 1911. One reader called us from Frazier Park to let us know that he had on his property what remains of a large pit that was thought to be where the grizzly bear was confined before being sent off north by train. A subspecies, the Mexican grizzly, has not been seen since 1964.



Here is Monarch, stuffed and on display; he was used as a model for the California state flag.

LIMONEIRA PROJECT MOVES AHEAD IN SANTA PAULA

The Limoneira Company's East Area One project adjacent to lower Santa Paula Creek has now passed its last hurdle, and construction may begin shortly. KSWC appealed its approval several years ago, as the project's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) had failed to analyze the risks of flooding from lower Santa Paula Creek, which is now confined to a narrow concrete channel, where it has historically topped its banks and flooded parts of Santa Paula. Limoneira moved to order a Supplemental EIR, in which the company agreed to leave a buffer zone next to Santa Paula Creek, with no houses on it, to allow for the future potential widening of the creek in that area. The Army Corps of Engineers built the concrete creek channel 20 years ago without ever considering the enormous flow of sediment that moves down in big storms and gets deposited in the channel, causing flooding.

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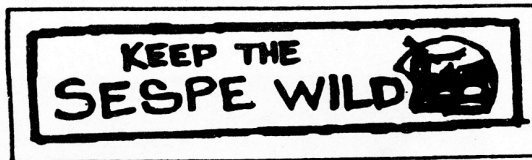
Our original T-shirts are light blue with the Keep the Sespe Wild logo in five colors.

Our newer T-shirts are white with the same five color logo on the back, and with an additional, pocket-sized logo in blue on the left front.

Please state white or blue with your order. Sizes are S, M, L, XL and XXL.

**All 100%
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All prices include tax and shipping. Please include address and a phone number. Allow 2 to 3 weeks for delivery.

**Send your order and check, made out to KSWC to:
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IN MEMORIAM OF BOB BARTSCH OF PASADENA, LONG TIME FOREST FEE FOE

Bob Bartsch was a lifelong outdoorsman, naturalist, geologist, machinist, music box & nickelodeon antiquarian, mining & railroad historian, and as many knew him, a passionate defender of free access to our nation's public lands and an opponent of the Adventure Pass forest fee program.

Bob was a fixture at Angeles National Forest kiosks and other locations on most weekends. He handed out flyers, talked to the public, and encouraged people to practice non-compliance to this ill-conceived program. All this he did right in front of the Forest Service, daring them to try and stop him. He forced them to attempt to defend what they were doing. Bob was fearless in the face of adversity and would not be backed down by uniformed Forest Service officials or the threat of arrest. He was a constant thorn in the side of the Adventure Pass staff in the Angeles National Forest.

He was at the forefront of this cause in southern California. He networked and coordinated with hundreds of people in a concerted effort to put an end to the Adventure Pass and the nationwide recreation fee program. He gave lectures and talked to newspapers, radio and television stations, marched in parades, and organized protests. We shall miss his enthusiasm and good nature. Our condolences both to Sonja and to the rest of his family.

