

**Santa Barbara News-Press**

**County Planning Commission OKs drilling 26 oil wells  
- 1,400-acre site situated 10 miles north of Los Olivos**

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The Santa Barbara County Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve the drilling of 26 new oil wells in North County back country.

The project, proposed by Underground Energy, Inc., will be located at a site of approximately 1,421 acres in the San Rafael Mountains approximately 10 miles north of Los Olivos. Currently the land is being used for cattle grazing. The site is recognized by the California Conservation Department of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources as a potential site for oil development, and is described as "pre-disturbed," having been explored before in the 1940s.

The project would be divided into two phases: an initial exploratory phase, and should the first phase be productive, a second, drilling phase. The first phase includes the drilling of up to four exploratory wells over a one-year period, using a 90-foot high drill rig as well as cavity pumping units and production test equipment. According to the staff report, the operation would be continuously manned.

The second phase, should the site prove viable for oil production, could last 15 years or more, depending on oil production rates, and would also be affected by commodity price and funds availability for continued development. Estimates in the staff report project a production rate of two new wells per year. Facilities to be built and installed for Phase 2 include a three-phase separator, tanks for storage and cleaning, a flare for disposal of excess gas, as well as permanent fire facilities.

Should the initial test wells prove unproductive, the wells will be plugged, abandoned and cleaned up.

The Commission had a few concerns regarding mitigations and monitoring, and added suggestions to minimize lighting impacts for the 24-hour operations for the drilling phase. Third District Commissioner Marell Brooks aired her concern over potential fire hazards.

"I am concerned about the fire," she said, pointing out that the site was considered a high fire risk zone. However, both the county fire inspector and Fifth District Commissioner Daniel Blough were convinced that the monitoring would be adequate.

"I'm not the least bit concerned. We have a very professional compliance staff, we have a very professional fire department," he said.

With a few more attempts at fine tuning the Los Alamos Community Plan, the planning commissioners forwarded the document, along with its associated environmental impact report and monitoring plan to the Board

of Supervisors. Adoption of the plan includes changes in the county land use code. The plan provides long-term guidelines for future development of semi-rural Los Alamos.

Outstanding issues that the commissioners dealt with include a parking plan in anticipation of full buildout, eliminating redundancies in air quality standards, case-by case determinations for creek setbacks and flood control, as well as establishment of 65 decibel noise standards for exterior living spaces. Commissioners also added direction to take up the matter of truck traffic on Bell Street, a main artery.

The Board of Supervisors is expected to take the matter up in the near future.