

# The long, strong arm of Measure J

## *Carpinteria's onshore Paredon proposal could encourage further oil drilling operations across Ventura County*

**Paul Sisolak, Ventura County Reporter, 6-3-10**

Measure J appears on Santa Barbara County ballots next week and will ask Santa Barbara County voters to approve a 175-foot-high oil derrick towering over Santa Barbara County waters, and 35 slant drilling wells on Santa Barbara County soil. By all superficial accounts, it's a Santa Barbara County-centric issue.

But critics of the long-festering Paredon Project say that Carpinteria's most controversial industrial project in the entire history of the beachside hamlet could cause repercussions for years to come in unincorporated areas and beyond, across the Ventura County line.

For years on end, much has been debated over Carpinteria and its thorny relationship with corporate neighbor Venoco Inc., the city's resident oil company, which is behind the onshore drilling proposal. With Paredon's qualifying as a ballot initiative last year, its outcome is mostly clear-cut: a yes vote guarantees drilling on Carpinteria area beaches.

However, even if the measure fails, existing offshore oil drilling will continue in post-Gulf spill waters.

Supporters of the "No on Measure J" group believe that the ramifications for Ventura County from implementing Paredon aren't as apparent right now but could reveal themselves in the form of environmental effects and relaxed legislation calling for similar drilling projects in Ventura, over time.

"This can have implications for every town in California. Certainly, people are concerned in Ventura County, residents of Rincon and the South Coast," says Ted Rhodes, a co-chair of the group.

Those residents, some of whom are already faced with the sight of Rincon Island off Highway 101 and, likewise, the Ventura oil fields off Highway 33 south of the Ojai Valley, may be treated to another eyesore with construction of the Paredon derrick, says Nathan Alley, an attorney with the Environmental Defense Center, which backs the No on J coalition.

"That would clearly make a new regional landmark seen up and down the coast," he said. "It's so close to the line, there are points in Ventura where it'd be visible."

Part of the broader legislative impacts a project like Paredon can inflict on Ventura County comes about through a lack of local process. Alley and the EDC disagree with Measure J's language, in part, because it excludes city officials in Carpinteria from conducting their own environmental reviews on the drilling project, should the initiative pass. If it does pass, similar pieces of legislation could pop up across the state, and Ventura is no exception, he says, where city leaders from Fillmore to Ojai, to Oxnard and Camarillo could be powerless to stop similar proposals.

With the passage of Measure J, Alley said, "The city (of Carpinteria) would essentially be awarding a coastal development permit to this corporation. It's never been done before this way, and if it goes through and passes and survives legal challenges, it would create precedents for other private corporations to come into cities."

Immediate environmental effects of the Paredon Project, whether Santa Barbara, Ventura or beyond, is the topic of most debate. Three oil and gas productions are already in operation in northern Ventura County along the 101, confirms Mike Villegas, director of the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District.

Those include the aforementioned Rincon Island partnership, Villegas said, another held by Dos Cuadras Offshore Resources, and a third, small facility on the inland side run by Pacific Offshore LLC.

Representatives from Venoco say that onshore drilling is, without a doubt, safer than its oceanic alternative. Should the rare oil spill occur, says Lisa Rivas, Venoco community relations manager, it wouldn't flow out into the Pacific; rather, it would be contained in the Venoco plant.

"Any kind of a spill would spill into the onshore facility," Rivas said, then clarifying, "The risk of a spill is a one-in-one billion chance."

Since the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which continues more than a month later, opponents to oil drilling are playing devil's advocate with Paredon and its potential implications for Ventura County.

"There's no question that if there was a spill, that it would impact the beaches in Ventura (County), starting with Rincon, all the way down to Ventura," said Paul Jenkin, director of Surfrider.

Steve Bennett, Ventura County's First District supervisor, whose jurisdiction includes the territory immediately south of the Ventura/Santa Barbara County line, expressed his skepticism.

"You have to be concerned that given the regulatory climate that's existed the past decade, it's very hard to trust anybody's assurances that they've got it under control," said Bennett.

Yet as Venoco says that it will have Paredon under control, until Measure J passes, it's emphasizing its place as a good business neighbor and tax revenue generator, especially in Ventura County.

Venoco already has a trio of oil drilling projects in place here, the first a facility situated in Montalvo. There are Venoco wells near McGrath State Beach, Rivas said, in addition to directional drills leading to an offshore reservoir near Oxnard strawberry fields.

The successes of those Venoco operations alone generated nearly \$2 million in tax revenues for Ventura County through 2008 and 2009, according to Rivas.

For information on both sides of the issue, visit [www.citizensagainstparedon.org](http://www.citizensagainstparedon.org) and [www.carpinteriainitiative.com](http://www.carpinteriainitiative.com).