

# Schwarzenegger pulls support for coastal drilling in wake of oil spill

**Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee, 5-4-10**

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger withdrew his support Monday for a new oil drilling project off the Santa Barbara coast in the wake of a massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Republican governor for two years had pushed the Tranquillon Ridge project as a way to raise money for California's strapped budget.

In his January plan, Schwarzenegger projected an advance of \$100 million and then \$1.8 billion over 14 years by allowing Houston-based Plains Exploration and Production Co. (PXP) to drill into California waters from an existing oil platform in federal territory.

He had a change of heart over the weekend.

"I see on TV the birds drenched in oil, the fishermen out of work, the massive oil slick destroying our precious ecosystem," Schwarzenegger said at a wildfire preparedness event at McClellan airfield. "It will not happen here in California, and this is why I'm withdrawing my support for the T-Ridge project."

The governor had proposed using proceeds from oil drilling to pay for the California State Parks budget. He suggested Monday the state would try to find that money elsewhere.

California has maintained a four-decade moratorium on new offshore oil drilling in state waters.

PXP in 2008 reached agreement with some Santa Barbara environmentalists to drill in California waters at Tranquillon Ridge in exchange for agreeing to shut off other platforms after nine years and the Tranquillon Ridge platform after 14 years. PXP also agreed to donate land and money toward environmental efforts.

Linda Krop, chief counsel of Environmental Defense Center, which negotiated the agreement, said her group was "mystified" by the governor's reversal. She said the deal would have prevented oil spills by removing existing platforms from federal waters.

But major environmental groups opposed the plan. They questioned whether the PXP deal was enforceable and feared it would set a new precedent for oil drilling in California waters.

"The Sierra Club is glad to see a high-ranking public official recognizing the danger of our addiction to fossil fuels," said Bill Magavern of Sierra Club California in a statement. "It's too bad that it takes a tragedy of this scale to convince drilling supporters to change their ways."

The three-member State Lands Commission, which reviews new oil leases, rejected the proposal last year, with a lone vote of support from a Schwarzenegger appointee.

At the time, Democrat John Garamendi was still on the commission by virtue of serving as lieutenant governor. He has since left for Congress and was replaced last week by Republican Abel Maldonado, who said he would be willing to review the Tranquillon Ridge project despite his past opposition to offshore oil drilling.

"I think that we all go through the endless amount of studies and research and everything, and before you make a decision like that, you are convinced that this will be safe," Schwarzenegger said. "But then again, you know, you see that, you turn on television and see this enormous disaster and you say to yourself, 'Why would we want to take that risk?' "