

Voters in SoCal beach town consider drilling plan

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CARPINTERIA, Calif.—Less than two months after one of the nation's worst oil spills polluted the Gulf of Mexico, voters in Carpinteria will decide whether they want to allow an oil company to expand its operations off their coast.

On June 8, Carpinteria residents will go to the polls to decide whether Denver-based Venoco Inc. can slant drill from an onshore rig to an existing reservoir two miles offshore. The company is currently allowed to drill in reservoirs below its facility on land in Carpinteria, which is about 85 miles north of Los Angeles.

If approved, the Paredon Oil and Gas Development Initiative would still have to go before the state Coastal Commission and State Lands. Carpinteria and Santa Barbara County could get as much as \$200 million in royalties.

Lisa Rivas, a spokeswoman for the company, estimated it would be able to draw up to 11,000 barrels of oil a day from the offshore reservoir, which contains about 22 million barrels of oil.

She called the Gulf spill "a terrible situation" but also said it hasn't slowed the daily need for oil and natural gas.

"California is the largest consumer of oil," she said. "We are not stopping our consumption when things like this happen in the Gulf. People are just acting irrational and saying 'no more,' yet nobody stops driving their cars or using their natural gas dryers."

Project critics, including Citizens Against Paredon, say Measure J would allow the oil company to bypass the city's public review process. Venoco had tried to go through the city but withdrew its application last year and eventually introduced its initiative.

Earlier this month, another proposal to expand drilling at an existing platform off Santa Barbara County lost key support following the Gulf spill. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who had hoped royalties from the project would help the sagging budget, pulled his support for the proposal, dooming its short-term prospects.

"You turn on the television and see this enormous disaster, you say to yourself, 'Why would we want to take on that kind of risk?'" Schwarzenegger said at the time.