

New transport method for offshore oil is a pipe

Scott Steepleton, Santa Barbara News-Press, 2-22-12

With a reworked Everly Brothers song on their lips - "Bye bye barge, bye bye unhappiness, hello cleanliness, I think we're going to smile" - environmentalists on Tuesday bid farewell to the final oil barge from Venoco's Ellwood Marine Terminal, a move made possible by the county Board of Supervisors' decision to OK an oil pipeline from Ellwood to Gaviota.

Barging has been part of local oil production history since 1929. Since 1966, barges have been used to transfer oil produced at local offshore rigs to refineries from Long Beach to the Bay Area.

The marine terminal, adjacent to Coal Oil Point Reserve, was used to transport oil extracted at Platform Holly, in the Ellwood Field, then piped to shore and processed at the Ellwood Onshore Facility. From there, oil was piped to storage tanks on property owned by UCSB and then transferred onto a barge every 11 or 12 days.

The final chapter of that practice began with a vote of the Board of Supervisors Feb. 7.

"This is a great victory in our collective, ongoing fight to protect the coastline," said Hannah-Beth Jackson, Democrat hopeful for the 19th District state Senate seat and one of about a dozen people who walked to a bluff Tuesday afternoon to watch as an oil barge did its thing one last time.

While in the state Assembly, Ms. Jackson authored AB16, which requires oil produced offshore from new or expanded extractions to be transported onshore via pipeline.

"That was signed into law in 2003," she said. "It's now nine years later and finally this barge is making its farewell trip and I could not be happier."

In a statement after Tuesday's 2 p.m. gathering, Linda Krop, chief counsel at the Environmental Defense Center and attorney for Get Oil Out! and other environmental and community groups said, "Ending oil transport by the Ellwood barge will protect our coast from the risk of a major oil spill."

EDC and its clients, along with local and state agencies, urged Venoco to transport oil by pipeline beginning in 1997, when the company took over operations of the Ellwood Field.

"Onshore pipelines are safer, result in much less air pollution and avoid the risk of a devastating offshore oil spill," Ms. Krop said.

And the new pipeline has added safety features geared toward preventing a catastrophic spill.

Venoco, the last producer in the state to transport oil by marine barge rather than onshore pipeline, faced a 2013 deadline imposed by the State Lands Commission to come up with a new method of transportation.

Its method of choice: pipes.

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The company built a nearly 9-mile-long, 6-inch steel pipeline along the coast from its Ellwood Onshore Facility to the Plains Pipeline in Las Flores Canyon and put it into full operation in mid February.

The EDC says oil from Platform Holly will continue to be processed at Venoco's Ellwood facility. Instead of being barged to the marine terminal near UCSB, the oil will be put into the new pipeline and transported up the coast to the Plains Pipeline system. "From there the oil will be transported to refineries."

Officials with Denver, Colo.-based Venoco, which operates three offshore platforms in the Santa Barbara Channel, now must decide how to decommission the marine terminal, a process that will include review by the county and UCSB, which owns the land upon which the onshore portion of the marine terminal is located.

Ms. Krop credited EDC, its clients, as well as the city of Santa Barbara and county of Santa Barbara "with securing additional agreements from Venoco to modify its pipeline proposal and increase protections for coastal creeks and sensitive habitats."

Even Venoco officials sounded a positive refrain about the change.

"After 82 years, we share the community's sentiment in waving goodbye to that barge," Mike Edwards, Venoco vice president told the News-Press.

Tuesday's shipment, like others moved by the contract barge crews, was headed to a facility somewhere north or south of here.

Mr. Edwards said it's important to keep in mind that California is still dependent on imported oil.

"Every barrel that we can produce in the state displaces a barrel that comes in by ocean," he said.

Not everyone was singing praises in the same vein as the environmental groups.

"My take on this is that it's the highest form of hypocrisy for Hannah-Beth Jackson to pretend she is interested in coastal protection while she accepts money to promote offshore oil drilling in state waters, the PXP project," said Pedro Nava, former local Assembly member.

He's referring to a proposal by Plains Exploration and Production of Houston, Texas, to expand slant drilling off the Santa Barbara County coast in exchange for a permanent halt to drilling and exploration beginning in 2022; a deal that could have brought the state \$100 million a year in revenues, proponents said.

The deal was killed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2010 and Mr. Nava, who termed out of office at the end of that year, says helping strike it down is his proudest moment.

That was, he said, the beginning of the end for offshore drilling.

But Ms. Jackson, he noted, as a paid consultant for EDC, worked to promote the PXP project, which would have been the first new drilling in state waters since the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill.

"I, too, am grateful that the barge won't be operating anymore," he told the News-Press on Tuesday. "But I'm

also grateful that the PXP proposal was defeated, while Hannah-Beth Jackson was trying to get it approved."

"People are entitled to know how much she was paid to promote PXP," Mr. Nava added.

Ms. Jackson would not say.

"I have been a strong supporter of getting rid of offshore oil drilling for years," she told the News-Press, adding that her first piece of legislation was aimed at doing just that.

"My position with respect to Mr. Nava is it's time we all move on to protect our community and get rid of offshore oil."

But, was she paid to promote the PXP plan?

"I don't intend to engage Mr. Nava in a silly little patter back and forth," Ms. Jackson said.

