

## 2 counties pass fracking ban; another rejects similar measure

**Anne C. Mulkern, Environment & Energy Publishing, 11-5-14**

Two California counties yesterday passed ballot measures banning fracking and other unconventional oil drilling, while another county rejected a similar measure.

San Benito County, located east of Monterey, approved a block on hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, along with other "high-intensity petroleum operations," including acid well stimulation treatments and cyclic steam injection. The initiative prevailed on a 57.4 percent to 42.6 percent vote.

Mendocino County, north of Napa, passed anti-fracking Measure S with 67.18 percent in favor and 32.82 percent opposed.

Meanwhile, Santa Barbara County voted 37.35 percent to 62.65 percent to defeat Measure P, which had much of the same language as Measure J in San Benito County.

"We're just so happy and just want to thank the voters of Santa Barbara County," said Jim Byrne, spokesman for the No on P campaign. "They stepped up and they understood, and basically confirmed that this industry, which has been operating in this county for over a century ... is important to our community," providing jobs and tax revenues, he said.

Students and environmentalists worked to put Measure P on the ballot, while interests that included Chevron Corp., Exxon Mobil Corp. and Occidental Petroleum Corp. contributed roughly \$7 million in a bid to defeat the Santa Barbara County initiative.

Rebecca Claassen, chairwoman of the Yes on P effort, said the defeat in Santa Barbara was "a direct outcome from record-setting oil money funding deceptive claims."

She added that "the hearts and minds of Santa Barbara County have been set on a new course, away from dangerous oil extraction and toward renewable energy. This campaign was the beginning of the fight -- not the end."

Oil companies spent about \$2 million to fight the San Benito County measure, said Kathryn Phillips, director of Sierra Club California.

"The oil industry really targeted Santa Barbara County," Phillips said. "They thought Santa Barbara was much more important."

### **Industry bigger in Santa Barbara**

About 1,500 oil wells operate in Santa Barbara County, which sits about 100 miles north of Los Angeles. Another 1,500 are in "idle" status and could come back online anytime without needing additional permits. There also are permit applications for about 300 new wells, and those aim to use cyclic steam injection.

There are only two oil companies operating in San Benito County and 26 total wells, said Chuck Finnie, a consultant with the No on Measure J campaign in San Benito County. There are no fracking operations.

"It really was a symbolic campaign," Finnie said of the push there. "It was an emotional, symbolic appeal that didn't have any basis in reality."

But he and others with No on J also said the measure was part of a game plan among those opposing fracking and other drilling.

"Measure J is part of an attack on the energy industry in California that is intended to halt petroleum production in our state one city and county at a time," the group said in a statement.

Adam Scow, with Californians Against Fracking and Food & Water Watch, said residents "waged a historic effort to ban fracking in their communities and protect the health of their neighborhoods and the environment."

The Mendocino measure was part of an ordinance establishing a "Community Bill of Rights." It said that residents "possess the right to water, air and soil that is untainted by toxins, carcinogens, particulates, nucleotides, and hydrocarbons introduced into the environment through unconventional extraction of hydrocarbons."

### **Effect of measures debated**

In both San Benito and Santa Barbara, there was heated debate over whether the measures would affect ongoing operations. Backers of the initiatives said that oil wells in place with the needed permits could continue drilling. Oil companies disagreed, arguing that they will likely need additional permits and that the county would be barred from issuing those approvals. Some contended that it would shut down the industry.

"It would have no effect on existing drilling. It only applied to future drilling," Phillips said. She said the oil company spending and its messages about shutting down the industry played a large role in the initiative's defeat.

"They bought the election," Phillips said. "They had tons of mailers" and TV advertisements. "Our side didn't have any money by comparison," she said.

Byrne with the opposition effort in Santa Barbara County, however, said "that's kind of taking the voters for granted. The voters had to decide."

The measure there was sold by backers as an anti-fracking measure, he said, when there are currently no oil operations using fracking.

"It was very difficult for the average voter to try and diagnose," Byrne said. He added that the campaign money was spent because "the voters had to be informed of the issues at hand. The industry is going to do anything it can to survive. The industry was under affront."