

# Planners OK Garey drilling plan

**Sam Womack, Santa Maria Times, 1-22-10**

A new take on an old Texaco oil project east of Santa Maria was given the green light Wednesday by the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission to “drill, baby, drill.”

After two years involved in the planning process, Rock Energy LLC, a Bakersfield-based company, has plans to be up and running within six months of securing all the remaining necessary state and county permits and approvals.

The plan includes 19 new oil wells, one water injection well, a steam generator, construction of a new tank battery, pipelines for natural gas, oil, water and steam, and electric power poles and conduit, according to the county staff report.

The proposed new wells, known as the Tunnel Lease, would be on 150 acres within the Cat Canyon Oil Field, near Orcutt-Garey and Foxen Canyon roads.

In 1966, Texaco drilled oil from about 30 wells in the area, and Rock Energy hopes to use steam technology to pump out the crude that was left.

The drilling equipment would be concentrated on 2.3 acres, and slant-drilling will be used to reach well sites on other parcels, according to John Stahl, agent for Rock Energy.

Based on Rock Energy’s estimates, 1,000 barrels of oil could be pumped a day for approximately 10 years.

Stahl told commissioners Wednesday that the drilling project would result in 30 short-term jobs and five positions in ongoing operations.

He added that it would bring in “significant new property tax,” but could not give a specific estimate.

There is potential for the plan to flop after the exploratory phase, in which case the wells would be plugged and abandoned, according to state and local requirements.

On Wednesday, there was only one person with significant worries — that the 19 newly drilled oil wells, might affect his family’s water well.

Joel Jennings moved his family to the small community of Garey less than two years ago, and like the other approximately 200 residents, owns and maintains his own well. Garey is just north of the project site

“The (environmental study) states that there will be less than significant degradation to the ground water supply,” Jennings told the commission. “But in the unlikely event that the groundwater does become contaminated by drilling and exploration, I want to know what kind of protection the county will offer to Garey residents with private water wells.”

The question was not answered during the public hearing, but supervising planner John Karamitsos said later that the initial review and approval of a private water well, monitoring lies only in the landowner’s purview.

“I’m not aware of any provisions at the county level,” Karamitsos said. “Other than the heavily regulated drilling procedure ... and carefully monitoring the oil facility production” by various local and state agencies.

The Planning Commission approved the project on a 4-0 vote, and Commissioner Michael Cooney recused himself due to a connection with Ken Hunter, president of Vaquero Energy, a sister company to Rock Energy.

The issue that received the most attention from the board members was how to shield the project’s lights at night, and during inclement weather, from any neighbors in the rural area.