



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Fact Sheet

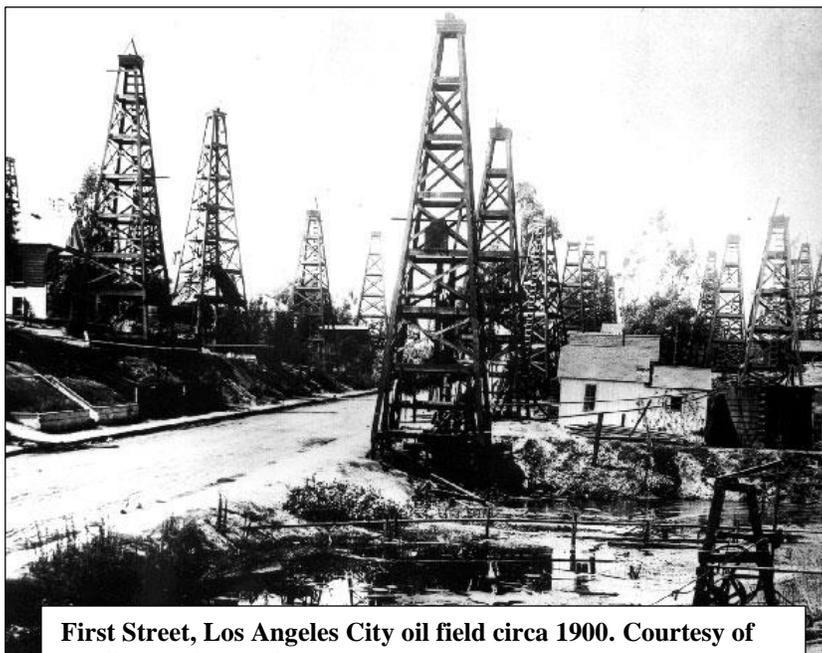
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Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources

Los Angeles Oil Production History

The two idle wells in the Echo Park neighborhood the Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources intends to permanently seal are a legacy of the long history of oil production in the Los Angeles Basin. Both the Patel 1 and Rogalske 10 wells were drilled before 1903, more than a decade before the Division was created to oversee the industry in California.

California produced a quarter of the world's oil by 1930, and the growth of Los Angeles – from a population of 50,000 in the 1890s to more than a million in 1930 – mirrored the growth of the industry. Beverly Hills, Venice and Huntington Beach were built atop former oil fields. In many locations, oil production continues amidst homes and business. Some oil companies have concealed their operations, covering up oil wells with facades (such as the well-known brightly painted derrick at Beverly Hills High School) and abating noise and odor issues to the extent possible.



First Street, Los Angeles City oil field circa 1900. Courtesy of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles Museum of Natural History.

The Los Angeles City field – the field into which Patel 1 and Rogalske 10 are drilled -- was discovered in 1893 by a gold prospector named Edward L. Doheny and his business partner Charles A. Canfield. The first well in the field (the “discovery well”) was located between Beverly Boulevard and Colton Avenue, near present-day Dodger Stadium. The site is now a parking lot for a swimming pool. It set off an oil boom by producing 45 barrels a day. The field had 500 wells within four years and led the state in production. In 1895, the Los Angeles City field produced approximately 750,000 of the 1.2 million barrels produced in the state. At one point, over-production became so acute that the price of oil plummeted.

But oil use and production in California long preceded the Los Angeles City field. Spanish explorers found natural oil seeps in California in the 1500s; the La Brea Tar Pits are an example of such a seep. Native Americans used asphaltum -- very thick oil gathered from natural seeps -- to waterproof baskets and jars, to fasten arrow points to shafts, and for ornaments. The explorers, in turn, used asphaltum to seal seams in their ships. It is reported that as early as 1856, a company organized in San Francisco began distilling oil from the La Brea Ranch near Los Angeles.

California saw its first oil gusher in February 1892. While being drilled in Adams Canyon near Santa Paula

in Ventura County, Union Oil Company's well No. 28 hit oil, which flowed an estimated 1,500 barrels per day. Unfortunately, no storage facilities were available for such amounts of oil. The oil ran down Adams Canyon into the Santa Clara River, and on to the ocean. The well produced about 40,000 barrels of oil before the flow was controlled.

With the exception of Wilmington field, all of the large oil fields in the Los Angeles area were discovered between 1920 and 1930. These include Huntington Beach in 1920, Long Beach and Santa Fe Springs in 1921, and Dominguez in 1923.

The Wilmington field – which stretches from San Pedro Bay through Long Beach and east of the Palos Verdes Peninsula -- was discovered in 1932. It is the third largest field in the nation in terms of cumulative production; in 2013, the USGS estimated another 900 million barrels remain in the field. The artificial THUMS Islands in Long Beach Harbor are drilled into the Wilmington field. Los Angeles County is second only to Kern County in current California production, and California ranks third in the nation in crude oil production.

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