



**page 3** Jim Mulva to succeed Dunham as chairman of ConocoPhillips

## July Petroleum Directory inside



JUDY PATRICK

Section B of this issue of Petroleum News is the monthly Petroleum Directory. Companies profiled this month are Northwest Arctic Air, Arctic Foundations, MWH Global, Cruz Construction and Usibelli Coal Mine.

### Rowan narrows loss in second quarter on stronger Gulf rig use

Rowan, first of the major contract drillers to report 2004 second-quarter earnings, narrowed its expected loss on stronger rig utilization in the Gulf of Mexico and landed a major contract on the Gulf's continental shelf for one of the company's specialized "ultra-deep" drilling rigs.

Rowan's rig utilization in the U.S. Gulf during the second quarter rose to 88 percent compared to 82 percent in the prior quarter, setting the stage for a strong recovery that could pull the company out of the red later this year.

*But the company stressed that all 25 of its offshore rigs were under contract for the first time in about six months, noting that two of its Gorilla rigs and one Super Gorilla class jack-up had been largely idle since January.*

see **ROWAN** page A16

## BREAKING NEWS

**3 Oil sands plants hit:** Unscheduled maintenance forces two of Canada's three integrated operations to trim '04 production forecasts

**4 Alaska needs petrochemical industry:** Group of university faculty members recommends in-state processing of natural gas liquids

**7 Pioneer negotiating West Africa deal:** Working on risky, potentially lucrative agreement; has MOU with Chrome Energy subsidiary

## NORTH SLOPE ALASKA

# Where they lead

Armstrong to drill 2004-05 exploration wells on Kuparuk's western edge

By **KRISTEN NELSON**

Petroleum News Editor-in-Chief

**A**rmstrong Alaska Inc. will explore adjacent to the Kuparuk River unit on Alaska's North Slope this winter. And, if that exploration is successful, the company hopes to be in production next year.

The company has filed a plan of operation with the state of Alaska for up to three exploration wells just off the western edge of the Kuparuk River unit. Armstrong calls it the "Two Bits" prospect — it took the tract with a bid 27 cents an acre higher than a competing bid from AVCG at the state's areawide North Slope lease sale last October.



**STU GUSTAFSON**



**BILL ARMSTRONG**



**MATT FURIN**

JUDY PATRICK PHOTOS

Armstrong told the state the wells will be drilled during the 2004-05 winter season "from an existing gravel pad" which will be accessed by a three mile ice road from the Kuparuk River unit 2M pad, which is connected to the North Slope

see **ARMSTRONG** page A19

## NORTH SLOPE ALASKA

# Kerr-McGee plans to drill up to six North Slope wells

Exploration drilling offshore Milne Point unit will evaluate Nikaitchuq discovery

By **KRISTEN NELSON**

Petroleum News Editor-in-Chief

**K**err-McGee Oil & Gas Corp. has filed an operation plan with the state of Alaska to drill up to six exploration wells this winter offshore the Milne Point unit, three miles north of Oliktok Point, from two to three locations, using two, and possibly three, drilling rigs.

Operations Manager Todd Durkee told Petroleum News July 14 that the company included all of the options — from a single well to six

wells — in its operations plan. He said the company has not committed to any rig yet.

Kerr-McGee told the state the operations will be "nearly identical" to those in the same area last winter, with access by sea ice roads from Oliktok Point to ice pads on and adjacent to Spy Island.

Kerr-McGee will solicit bids for project management from local firms. Durkee said, he and Charles Summers alternated managing operations in Alaska last winter, and a similar rotation is

see **KERR-MCGEE** page A18

## CANADA

# Competing for deals

Canadian firms go after Western Canadian oil, gas assets as U.S. firms exit basin

By **GARY PARK**

Petroleum News Calgary Correspondent

**T**his year could see the oil and gas yard sale to beat them all in Canada, as buyers and sellers jostle to take advantage of sky-high commodity prices before they weaken.

Four major transactions alone racked up more than C\$2.4 billion in deals to the mid-point of 2004 and financial services firm Raymond James estimates the sell off could add another C\$5.3 billion over the second half, not counting C\$2 billion in assets being privately marketed.

The merger and acquisition market over the last 12 months has primarily been driven by U.S.-based companies opting to take advantage of a red-hot market and shift their activities to lower-cost, higher-growth prospects outside North America.



COURTESY OF BG GROUP

In February, BG returned to Canada after an absence of a decade with the purchase of western Canadian assets from El Paso. Pictured above is the Sundown a-7-F condensate handling facility, one of the assets BG bought in British Columbia.

Among analysts, there is also a widely held view that the U.S. firms, who flooded into Western Canada

see **DEALS** page A18



# Alaska - Mackenzie Rig Report

Rig Owner/Rig Type      Rig No.      Rig Location/Activity      Operator or Status

## Alaska Rig Status

### North Slope - Onshore

Rig Owner/Rig Type	Rig No.	Rig Location/Activity	Operator or Status
<b>Doyon Drilling</b>			
Dreco 1250 UE	14 (SCR/TD)	Milne Point, reentry MPI-17	BP
Sky Top Brewster NE-12	15 (SCR/TD)	Deadhorse yard	Available
Dreco 1000 UE	16 (SCR)	W pad sidetrack W-09	BP
Dreco D2000 UEBD	19 (SCR/TD)	Alpine, drilling CD2-53	ConocoPhillips
OIME 2000	141 (SCR/TD)	Infield Kuparuk, drilling 1E-112 multilateral	ConocoPhillips

### Nabors Alaska Drilling

Trans-ocean rig	CDR-1 (CT)	Stacked, Prudhoe Bay	Available
Dreco 1000 UE	2-ES (SCR)	Prudhoe Bay, C-17B	BP
Mid-Continent U36A	3-S	Prudhoe Bay, 1C-08	ConocoPhillips
Oilwell 700 E	4-ES (SCR)	Prudhoe Bay, R-09A	BP
Dreco 1000 UE	7-ES (SCR/TD)	Prudhoe Bay, N-07A	BP
Dreco 1000 UE	9-ES (SCR/TD)	Prudhoe Bay, V-213I	BP
Oilwell 2000 Hercules	14-E (SCR)	Stacked, Deadhorse	Available
Oilwell 2000 Hercules	16-E (SCR/TD)	Stacked, Prudhoe Bay	Available
Oilwell 2000	17-E (SCR/TD)	Stacked, Point McIntyre	Available
Emsco Electro-hoist -2	18-E (SCR)	Stacked, Deadhorse	Available
OIME 1000	19-E (SCR)	Stacked, Deadhorse	Available
Emsco Electro-hoist Varco TDS3	22-E (SCR/TD)	Stacked, Milne Point	Available
Emsco Electro-hoist	28-E (SCR)	Stacked, Deadhorse	Available
OIME 2000	245-E	Stacked, Kuparuk	Available

### Nordic Calista Services

Superior 700 UE	1 (SCR/TD)	DS K-9	BP
Superior 700 UE	2 (SCR)	Endicott, L-2-21-A	BP
Ideco 900	3 (SCR/TD)	Kuparuk, demobilized to 1-Q	ConocoPhillips

### North Slope - Offshore

<b>Nabors Alaska Drilling</b>			
Oilwell 2000	33-E (SCR/TD)	Stacked, NorthStar	BP
Emsco Electro-hoist Canrig 1050E	27-E (SCR/TD)	Stacked at 12-acre pad	Kerr-McGee

### Cook Inlet Basin - Onshore

<b>Aurora Well Service</b>			
Franks 300 Srs. Explorer III	AWS 1	Granite Point, completing Kaloa #2 Moving back to Nicoali Creek #3 to rerun completion	Aurora Gas

### Evergreen Resources Alaska

Wilson Super 38	96-19	Stacked in Wasilla yard	Evergreen Resources Alaska Corporation
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### Inlet Drilling Alaska/Cooper Construction

Kremco 750	CC-1	Stacked, Kenai	Forest Oil
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### Kuukpik

	5	Happy Valley #7	Unocal
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### Marathon Oil Co.

<b>(Inlet Drilling Alaska labor contractor)</b>			
Taylor	Glacier 1	Beaver Creek #14	Marathon

### Nabors Alaska Drilling

Rigmasters 850	129	Kenai, Star #1	Unocal
National 110 UE	160 (SCR)	Stacked, Kenai	Available
Continental Emsco E3000	273	Stacked, Kenai	Available
	51	Steelhead platform, done 12-1-03	Unocal
IDECO 2100 E	429E (SCR)	Stacked, removed from Osprey platform	Available

### Water Resources International

Ideco H-35 KD		Prep to resume operations	Pelican Hill
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### Cook Inlet Basin - Offshore

<b>Cudd Pressure Control</b>	340K	Workover, Osprey Platform	Forest Oil
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### Unocal (Nabors Alaska Drilling labor contractor)

Not Available

### XTO Energy (Inlet Drilling Alaska labor contract)

National 1320	A	Idle	XTO
National 110	C (TD)	Idle	XTO

## Mackenzie Rig Status

### Mackenzie Delta-Onshore

<b>AKITA Equitak</b>			
Dreco 1250 UE	62 (SCR/TD)	Stacked Tuktoyaktuk, NT	EnCana
Dreco 1250 UE	63 (SCR/TD)	Stacked, Lucas Point, NT	Chevron Canada
National 370	64	Stacked, Inuvik, NT	Available

### Central Mackenzie Valley

<b>AKITA/SAHTU</b>			
Oilwell 500	51	Stacked in Norman Wells, NT	Available

### Nabors Canada

	62	Racked	Available
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The Alaska - Mackenzie Rig Report as of July 15, 2004.  
Active drilling companies only listed.

TD = rigs equipped with top drive units WO = workover operations  
CT = coiled tubing operation SCR = electric rig

This rig report was prepared by Wadeen Hepworth



Nabors Drilling employees

JUDY PATRICK

### Baker Hughes North America rotary rig counts\*

	July 9	July 2	Year Ago
US	1,207	1,201	1,065
Canada	313	397	382
Gulf	91	93	103

### Highest/Lowest

US/Highest	4530	December 1981
US/Lowest	488	April 1999
Canada/Highest	558	January 2000
Canada/Lowest	29	April 1992

\*Issued by Baker Hughes since 1944

### Rig start-ups expected in next 6 months

Rig Owner/No.	Rig Location/Activity	Operator
<b>Aurora Gas</b> AWS1	Will be moving to Kaloa 3 and then to Long Lake 1 for a re-entry	Aurora Gas
<b>XTO Energy</b> A & C	The rig on platform C will be reactivated in August 2004.	XTO

The Alaska - Mackenzie Rig Report is sponsored by:



## ALBERTA

### Oil sands plants hit by unplanned repairs

Unscheduled maintenance has forced two of Canada's three integrated oil sands operations to trim their production forecasts for 2004.

Suncor Energy said impurities in the raw bitumen it mined at its northern Alberta operation caused the temporary shutdown of an upgrader that produces refinery-ready synthetic oil, while Athabasca project operator Shell Canada had unexpected maintenance that resulted in lost production for the first half of July.

For Suncor the production target for the year has been trimmed to 220,000 barrels per day from its earlier estimate of 225,000-230,000 bpd, although that figure excludes its recently completed Firebag project, which is forecast to average 20,000 bpd and is planned to reach 35,000 bpd in 2005 as it taps a resource of 9.6 billion barrels.

Adding to the bad news, Suncor said the cash operating costs for its main facility will reach C\$12-\$12.50 per barrel for 2004, compared with an expected C\$10.75-\$11.75, reflecting costs of maintenance and natural gas, although the gas increase is likely to be offset by revenues generated from Suncor's own gas output which was nearly 200 million cubic feet per day in the first quarter.

Peter Best, an analyst with Credit Suisse First Boston, promptly lowered his 2004 per share profit target to C\$2.04 from C\$2.20 on the basis of the news.

Shell Canada — whose partners, Chevron Canada and Western Oil Sands, each hold 20 percent stakes — lost an unspecified volume of production when a treatment plant that separates oil from sand and clay was closed while a tank was cleaned out.

Jan Rowley, public affairs manager at Shell Canada, said the maintenance involved only "fairly simple repairs," allowing the consortium to resume its progressive growth from 136,000 bpd in the first quarter to its ultimate goal of 155,000 bpd.

With only 18 months' experience, Athabasca faces the usual "bugs" for a newer operation, said Thomas Ebbert an analyst with Tristone Capital.

The long-term target for operating costs at the project is C\$10-\$12 per barrel, assuming natural gas prices do not rise above C\$4 per thousand cubic feet, but Shell's most recent guidance points to 2004 costs of C\$12-\$14 per barrel, reflecting the impact on costs and volumes of its continued ramp-up in production.

—GARY PARK, Petroleum News Calgary correspondent

## HOUSTON, TEXAS

### James Mulva to succeed Archie Dunham as chairman of ConocoPhillips

The board of directors of ConocoPhillips has elected James Mulva to succeed Archie Dunham as chairman of the board upon Dunham's retirement on Sept. 30. The company said in a July 15 statement that Mulva will continue to serve as president and chief executive officer.

Mulva, speaking on behalf of the board of directors, thanked Dunham for his 40 years of dedicated service and his outstanding record of achievement at Conoco, DuPont and ConocoPhillips. "Your leadership and guidance were essential to the formation of ConocoPhillips and have been significant factors in its ongoing success," said Mulva.

"It has been a great honor for me to have been associated with wonderful employees at Conoco, DuPont and ConocoPhillips. I am proud of what we have accomplished together over the years, and I am very confident that, in Jim Mulva and the senior management team, the board has ensured strong leadership for ConocoPhillips' future," said Dunham.

Mulva's succession as chairman is consistent with the previously disclosed terms of the ConocoPhillips merger agreement, the company said.

Dunham also has elected to retire from the board of directors when he retires from ConocoPhillips, in keeping with current best practices in corporate governance. Dunham noted: "I have often given interviews and speeches on the importance of former chairmen and CEOs not continuing their board service after retirement in the interest of good governance."



JAMES MULVA

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• ALASKA

# Petrochemical industry would have big economic impact on Alaska

Group of faculty at University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Engineering and Mines recommends in-state processing of natural gas liquids from North Slope gas, cites example of Alberta

By PAUL METZ, GANG CHEN,  
SCOTT HUANG, TAO ZHU

For Petroleum News

A consortium of petrochemical producers and engineering firms including Dow, Shell, and Mitsubishi completed an investigation of the feasibility of the development of a petrochemical industry in Alaska in 1981 in anticipation of the construction on an Alaska natural gas pipeline project. The study was predicated on the completion of a gas pipeline project that would transmit Alaska North Slope natural gas to markets in the contiguous states at a rate of at least 2.7 bcf per day. This study was funded by industry but was made available to the state of Alaska and the communities that were considered as potential sites for a world class petrochemical complex.

The natural gas liquids that comprise 13 percent of the natural gas by volume account for a very large portion of the value of the proven natural gas reserves (35 tcf) on the North Slope. Inferred resources of conventional gas are estimated in excess of 165 tcf while unconventional sources of methane on the North Slope may exceed 600 tcf (see Table 1). At a production rate of 4 bcf per day, the conventional resources are estimated to have a production life of more than 100 years.

Prior to the sale of the North Pole Refinery, Williams completed a feasibility study for the construction of a much smaller petrochemical complex than that envisioned in the Dow-Shell investigation. This study was not made available to the general public. More recently Inter Pipeline Fund has shown an interest in processing natural gas liquids from Alaska at its facilities in Calgary (see Petroleum News, July 08, 2004).

## China now major market for petrochemicals

The products from a world-class petrochemical complex would include methanol, ethylene, polyethylene, ethylbenzene, ethylene glycol, Styrofoam,

## expertVIEW

The authors are members of the faculty at the College of Engineering and Mines, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Paul Metz is professor of geological engineering and chair of the Department of Mining & Geological Engineering; Gang Chen is professor of mining engineering; Scott Huang is professor of geological engineering; Tao Zhu is assistant professor of petroleum engineering.

alpha olefins, ethylene dichloride, ammonia, urea and caustic soda. The markets for these products in 1981 were the Gulf Coast of Texas and Japan. Today the major market is China. The production of these products was expected to produce an adequate rate of return on capital in 1981 contingent on the natural gas pipeline and a fair market price for the gas liquids. The production rates of various currently proposed natural gas pipeline alternatives range up to 4.5 bcf per day or more than 50 percent larger than the proposed project in 1981. Thus there is a significant increase in the economy of scale of production. Increases in product demand and prices as well as decreased transportation costs also have enhanced the current feasibility over the market conditions in 1981.

In addition to the gas liquids from the Alaska natural gas pipeline, benzene and water are necessary factor inputs. Benzene could be produced at the North Pole Refinery, southeast of Fairbanks and transported by pipeline to an adjacent petrochemical complex. The petrochemical plant would consume approximately 38,000,000 gallons of processed water per day. The North Pole location has adequate supplies of near surface groundwater and surface water from the Tanana River.

In addition to the natural gas pipeline other necessary infrastructural improve-

see VIEW page A5

## Annual Economic Impact of a Petrochemical Industry on Alaska

—Compiled by Metz, Chen, Huang, and Tao, July 2004

**BASIS:** Dow-Shell Group, 1981, Alaska Petrochemical Industry Feasibility Study Information Insights, 1999, Economic impact of the Petroleum Industry

**PREREQUISITE:** Development of North Slope Natural Gas and Competitively Priced Ethane and Production of Benzene at North Pole Refinery

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Power, Thermal Energy System, Railroad, Port Facilities, Water Supply System, Shipping, Fire Protection, Communication Systems, Housing, Medical Facilities, Support Services Industries

**PRODUCTS:** Methanol, Ethylene, Polyethylene, Ethylbenzene, Ethylene Glycol, Styrofoam, Alpha Olefins, Ethylene Dichloride, Ammonia, Urea, Caustic Soda

**MARKETS:** Japan, Gulf Coast (1981), China (2004)

Factor Inputs/Outputs	Gas Line @ 2.7 BCF/D (DowShell, 1981)	Gas Line @ 4.0 BCF/D (Metz, 2004)
Water	25,000,000 gpd	38,000,000 gpd
Power	245 megawatts	368 megawatts
Steam	1,230,000 lbs/hr	1,850,000 lbs/hr
Total	6.3 billion Btu/hr	9.5 billion Btu/hr
Healy Coal Equiv (7,500 Btu/lb)* Co-Generation**	3,700,000 tons/yr 6,200,000 tons/yr	5,600,000 tons/yr 9,300,000 tons/yr
Rail Freight - Products	8,820,000 ton	13,230,000 tons/yr
Rail Freight - Coal	6,200,000 tons/yr	9,300,000 tons/yr
Total	15,020,000 tons/yr	22,530,000 tons/yr
Ship Moorings	300/yr	450/yr
Capital Requirements (1981)	\$4.5 -5.0 billion	\$6.7 - 7.5 billion
Employment	6,800	10,200
Annual Contribution to Economy (of Alaska not including coal and benzene production and rail and ocean freight)	\$400 million	\$600 million
Coal and Transport Contribution	\$300 million	\$450 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$700 million</b>	<b>\$1,050 million</b>

\*Healy Coal Equivalent Assuming 100% Efficiency of a Co-Generation Plant

\*\*Healy Coal Equivalent Assuming 60% Efficiency of a Co-Generation Plant

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continued from page A4

**VIEW**

ments include the re-alignment of the Alaska Railroad to avoid transport of large volumes of hazardous materials and coal through Fairbanks, a railroad extension from Wasilla to Point McKenzie, and a deepwater port facility at that site. The port facility would need to support at least 450 moorings per year to transport the products to markets in the Pacific Rim. A railroad extension from North Poles south to Blair Lakes in support of military training activities is under preliminary design. Further extension of the railroad across the Northern Foothills of the Alaska Range would provide a high-speed rail link to the Nenana coal fields and a high-speed link for the first 75 miles of the rail transport of the petrochemical products to tidewater.

**Coal could meet energy needs of project**

The large scale project would require 370 megawatts of electricity and 1.85 million pounds per hour of steam. Meeting the energy requirements for petrochemical production would necessitate the combustion of at least 9.3 million tons of sub-bituminous coal per year. The utilization of coal rather than methane for the thermal requirements of petrochemical production as well as the production of electricity would not diminish the quantities of methane that would be transported by pipeline to markets in the contiguous states. The only product shipped through the natural gas pipeline south of Fairbanks to Midwest markets would be methane as a single phase. Thus pipeline transport costs and tariffs would be minimized. In addition at a power production scale in excess of 300 megawatts, the low sulfur coal has significant economic advantages over natural gas. Unlike coal, methane can be economically transported to competitive markets in Chicago.

Lignite, a lower rank coal than that from the Usibelli Coal Mine, is used to produce petrochemicals in Texas. Texas accounts for 75 percent of the petrochemical production in the United States. The Texas facilities, many of which are antiquated, are experiencing major shortages in feedstock as natural gas liquids production from Texas, Louisiana, and

*The products from a world-class petrochemical complex would include methanol, ethylene, polyethylene, ethylbenzene, ethylene glycol, Styrofoam, alpha olefins, ethylene dichloride, ammonia, urea and caustic soda. The markets for these products in 1981 were the Gulf Coast of Texas and Japan. Today the major market is China.*

Oklahoma continues to decline.

The project would provide an estimated 10,200 direct and indirect jobs at a capital cost of \$6.7-\$7.5 billion. The estimated contribution to the economy of the Fairbanks North Star Borough is at least \$600 million per year in the form of payroll, contractor and vendor services and supplies, and property taxes. This does not include the contributions from the six-fold increase in coal production from the Usibelli Coal Mine, the 22.5 million tons of added freight per year for the Alaska Railroad Corp., or the 13.23 million tons of petrochemical products that would be shipped through the port facilities at Point McKenzie. In-state coal production and petrochemical transport to tidewater will contribute an additional \$400 million per year to the economy of the state.

**Alberta requires in-province processing**

D.B. Reynolds, in a 2003 study, "Alaska and North Slope natural gas: Development issues and U.S. Canadian implications," estimated that methane production from the 35 tcf of proven reserves would generate approximately \$23 billion in royalties to the state of Alaska over the 23 year production period. Simply stated, this constitutes royalty revenue of \$1 billion per year to the state. This is assuming a well-head price of \$1.33 per million Btu. The in-state processing of the natural gas liquids has the potential of generating equivalent revenue to the economy of Alaska thus doubling the benefits of the natural gas pipeline.

Alaska should learn from the experiences of Alberta. When the province began to develop its natural gas resources on a large scale, it enacted

**Summary of North Slope Natural Gas Resources**

**SOURCES OF DATA:** Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys and U.S. Geological Survey

—Compiled by Metz, Chen, Huang, and Tao, July 2004

	Resource (trillion cubic feet)	Production Life in Years (at 4 billion cubic feet per day)
Proven Reserves in Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk:	35	23
State land outside existing oil and gas fields	65	43
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge	65	43
Coal Bed Methane (Barrow area only)	44	29
Gas Hydrates	590	388
<b>Total</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>526</b>

**NOTE:** Department of Energy estimates that the equivalent cost of conversion of coal to methane is \$4.00 per MCF of conventional natural gas. North Slope coal resources are estimated in excess of 3 trillion tons. The conversion of all this coal methane would result in a production life several times the total production life of all the other sources of methane on the North Slope. Conversion facilities would require very large quantities of capital equipment and very large quantities of annual operating supplies. THE MOST COST EFFECTIVE METHOD OF TRANSPORT OF THE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES TO THE ALASKA NORTH SLOPE IS BY RAIL. Rail access to the Alaska North Slope could be utilized for some of the logistic requirements of the MacKenzie Delta gas development.

statutes to prohibit the export of natural gas liquids without the processing of those liquids into higher unit value petrochemical commodities. Alaska should follow suit.

The rapid expansion of the economy of the Peoples Republic of China has resulted in large increases in demand for mineral and energy commodities. In 1981, China was a net exporter of energy while today it imports more than 30 percent of its petroleum requirements. The rapid increase in mineral commodity prices over the past year and the continued pressure on energy prices due to demand in China is expected to be a prelude to long-term trends. Due to Alaska's proximity to China it has an economic advantage in supplying China's material needs. It makes no economic sense to transport North Slope natural gas liquids south and east 1,800 miles from Fairbanks to Calgary and then ship the derived petrochemical products west to China. Fairbanks is 2,000 miles closer to Shanghai, China, than Calgary. The processing of North

Slope gas liquids in Fairbanks rather than Calgary will reduce transportation distances to the major Asian market by nearly 4,000 miles.

Chinese participation in petrochemical production in Alaska would require major diplomatic efforts from both the state and federal government. This would be the largest capital investment made by Chinese companies outside the mainland. It would also rank in the top six of all capital investments made within China.

From a Chinese perspective, Alaska is a secure and stable source of mineral and energy commodities relative to the Middle East, Indonesia, and Russia. Importation of materials from Alaska also has the advantage of decreasing the wide trade surplus that China experiences over the United States. Diminishing this imbalance in trade is in the best interest of both China and the United States. ●

*Note: The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the co-authors and have not been reviewed or endorsed by the University of Alaska.*

**LAFAYETTE, LA.**

**Stone sells assets**

Stone Energy has sold interests in 21 non-core properties in various regions of the Rocky Mountains for about \$8 million, Stone said July 12.

The properties make up about 1 percent of the firm's total estimated proved reserves at year-end 2003 and include approximately 28 percent of the company's well count in the Rockies. Stone did not disclose the buyers. At the time of the July 6 sale, Stone estimated that average net daily production from the 21 fields was less than 2 million cubic feet of natural gas equivalents: "Even though this divestiture will cause a slight decrease in proved reserves and production, the divestiture is strategically important to Stone enabling a more intense focus on projects that have a more material impact on our long-term reserves and production profiles," said David Welch, Stone's CEO.

—RAY TYSON, Petroleum News  
Houston correspondent

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## CANADA

## Government digs in on Petro-Canada share sale, says will be available soon

The Canadian government's shares in Petro-Canada will be on sale in a "very short time," said Finance Minister Ralph Goodale, brushing aside Canada's drastically changed political environment.

He said the sale, worth almost C\$3 billion at today's share values, was "explicitly included in the (federal) budget of March 23, the budget has been enacted, the budget has been adopted," he told reporters July 6. "So there's no change there at all."

The leftist New Democratic Party, which believes it holds the crucial balance of power in Canada's new Parliament, is flatly opposed to unloading the government's 19 percent holding in Petro-Canada. Following the June 28 election that left the governing Liberals in a minority position, NDP leader Jack Layton said only a "pathetic percentage" of the Petro-Canada proceeds have been earmarked for renewable energy solutions and indicated he would attempt to scuttle the sale plans.

But the major opposition party, the Conservatives, said during the election campaign they want the government out of Petro-Canada and, unless they change their mind, should ensure the sale takes place.

Goodale said that since March his officials have been putting the pieces in place, including close consultations with market experts, for what is "likely to be the largest (transaction) of its kind in Canadian history."

"Because that homework has already been done, it should be a very short time now before they can actually proceed," although that does not mean there will be an overnight flood of shares on the market, he said.

—GARY PARK, Petroleum News Calgary correspondent

• IRVING, TEXAS

# Magnum Hunter scores discoveries on Gulf's continental shelf

*Company, partners have made eight new oil and gas discoveries over past several months from 10 wells in shallow waters*

By RAY TYSON

*Petroleum News Houston Correspondent*

Texas-based Magnum Hunter Resources, one of the fastest growing exploration and production independents in the United States, says it and its partners have made eight new oil and gas discoveries over the past several months involving 10 wells in the shallow waters of the Gulf of Mexico's continental shelf.

Magnum Hunter, which holds a 50 percent working interest in a two-well field discovery drilled in May at South Marsh Island block 113, said July 14 that the wells

would be produced from a common platform production facility and produced via a pipeline to South Marsh Island block 108.

Construction was expected to begin late in the third quarter of 2004, with first production from block 113 anticipated during the fourth quarter. Production rates were not disclosed. Remington Oil and Gas owns the remaining 50 percent working interest and operates the block.

Production from an April discovery at West Cameron Block 567 is expected to come on stream in the third quarter, Magnum Hunter said. Production rates were not disclosed. Magnum owns a 37.5 percent working interest in the four lease blocks comprising the prospect area. Gryphon Exploration owns a 50 percent working interest and operates the block.

## Magnum Hunter will operate well at Main Pass block 99

Magnum Hunter, which owns a 100 percent working interest in a discovery at Main Pass block 99, said it would now operate the well it drilled together with Forest Oil in May. A new production pipeline will tie the well back to Magnum Hunter's Main Pass 178 A Platform. Initial production, which was not disclosed, is scheduled to begin during the fourth quarter.

This month a discovery well was drilled on Vermilion block 64 where first production is expected during the third quarter, Magnum Hunter said, adding that it owns a 25 percent working interest in the block, while Remington owns 50 percent and operates the lease. Production rates were not disclosed.

A new production test from two zones of 13.4 million cubic feet of gas and 1,350 barrels of condensate per day was recorded on a discovery at East Cameron block 205, Magnum Hunter said, adding that first production is expected in the third quarter. Magnum Hunter owns a 40 percent working interest in the block. Remington owns the remaining 60 percent working interest and operates the lease.

At Vermilion block 241, Magnum Hunter and Remington scored another discovery in April that tested at 22 million cubic feet of gas and 1,000 barrels of condensate per day from two horizons. Magnum holds a 50 percent interest in the discovery. Remington has a 50 percent interest and operates the block. First production is expected during the third quarter.

At West Cameron block 383, Magnum and Remington had another discovery that tested at 6.7 million cubic feet of gas equivalent per day. First production is expected in the third quarter. Magnum owns a 25 percent interest in the discovery, while Remington owns 50 percent and operates the block.

Magnum Hunter said a two-well discovery drilled in May at West Cameron block 398 began production earlier this month at a combined rate of 20 million cubic feet of gas equivalent per day. Magnum owns 40 percent of the discovery. Remington owns 60 percent and operates the block.●

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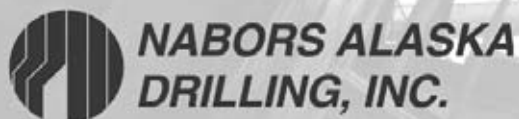
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## HOUSTON, TEXAS

### Vulcan Energy ups ante for Plains Resources to \$419 million

Vulcan Energy has agreed to increase its bid for independent energy company Plains Resources from \$16.75 to \$17.25 per share, Plains said July 12.

Microsoft co-founder and billionaire Paul Allen, along with Plains chairman James Flores and company chief executive John Raymond, are party to the proposed takeover through Vulcan Energy, an affiliate of Allen's Vulcan Capital.

Vulcan's proposal, which goes to Plains shareholders for their approval July 22, was valued at around \$419 million.

Plain's board of directors said it considered a competing offer from Leucadia National Corp. suggesting a leveraged recapitalization in which Plains would remain a public company, would borrow about \$175 million and use the proceeds to commence a tender offer to purchase up to 10 million shares of common stock at a price of \$17 per share, 25 cents less than Vulcan's final offer. The board rejected Leucadia's proposal and voted to amend an earlier agreement with Vulcan to raise the price to \$17.25 per share. The amendment also provides that Plains will pay Vulcan's expenses incurred to date in connection with the acquisition.

Plains said holders of about 17 percent of its outstanding common stock are contractually committed to vote for the new deal with Vulcan.

Plains is engaged in the acquisition, development and exploitation of oil and natural gas. Through its ownership in Plains All American Pipeline, a limited partnership, Plains also holds interests in lucrative midstream activities of marketing, gathering, transportation, terminaling and storage of oil.

—RAY TYSON, Petroleum News Houston correspondent

## WORLDWIDE

### IEA foresees an easing of growth in oil demand in 2005

Growth in world oil demand will slow to 2.2 percent in 2005, as China and other oil-hungry developing countries bump up against their limits for refining and transporting crude, the International Energy Agency said July 13.

Demand next year will average 83.2 million barrels a day, and crude supplies from Russia, Angola and Brazil will meet the bulk of the increased needs, the agency said in its monthly oil market report.

The Paris-based IEA is the energy watchdog for wealthy oil-importing countries. It analyzes the supply and demand for crude, but avoids predicting prices.

#### Oil demand will surge 3.2% in 2004, predicts IEA

For 2004, the agency predicted that oil demand will surge by 3.2 percent to an average of 81.4 million barrels a day, due partly to the transfer of manufacturing activity to less energy-efficient

see DEMAND page A8

## DALLAS, TEXAS

# Pioneer negotiating risky, potentially lucrative deal offshore West Africa

*Company has MOU with Nigeria's Chrome Energy subsidiary for joint evaluation of block in Joint Development Zone between Nigeria and The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe*

By RAY TYSON

Petroleum News Houston Correspondent

U.S.-based exploration and production independent Pioneer Natural Resources, with a goal of expanding its growing position in West Africa, is tiptoeing into an unexplored area of the Gulf of Guinea where the politics are shaky but the oil payoff could be huge.

Pioneer also could team up with a little known company noted for its financially troubled past involving a shareholder uprising back home in the United States and several company takeovers. Environmental Remediation Holding Corp. also had to contend with a military coup in The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, a tiny, politically unstable and poor island nation also located in the hydrocarbon-rich Gulf of Guinea.

ERHC, whose beginnings go back to Louisiana but which is now controlled by Nigeria's Chrome Energy, has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Pioneer calling for "the joint evaluation and participation" in Block 2 of the so-called Joint Development Zone, shared 60 percent by Nigeria and 40 percent by Sao Tome, following hard-fought negotiations over territorial rights.

#### Companies negotiating

ERHC did not return calls and Pioneer offered little additional information concerning the MOU, other than to say there was no deal with ERHC and that the companies were merely negotiating terms regarding a high-potential exploration block that has yet to be awarded by the Joint Development Zone authority.

Nevertheless, "we feel the potential could be great on that block," said Chris Paulsen of Pioneer's investor relations department.

Block 2 was among nine blocks offered in last year's first Joint Development Zone licensing round. Seismic company WesternGeco is said to have identified 17 prospects on the nine blocks with combined estimated reserves of 14.4 billion barrels of oil, a tidy volume indeed should the estimate prove to be accu-

rate.

Because of its early involvement with Sao Tome and Chrome's business and political connections in Nigeria, struggling ERHC was able to negotiate highly attractive preferential rights for six of the Joint Development Zone blocks.

In fact, ERHC once held the exclusive rights to manage all of Sao Tome's oil and gas affairs, despite the company's troubled background and lack of money. That deal included the right to explore and develop concessions of its choosing, plus an astounding 5 percent overriding royalty on all production generated by other companies that might have operated in Sao Tome's virgin waters.

A year ago, Major Fernando Pereira led a bloodless military coup in Sao Tome, accusing the government of corruption and the mismanagement of public funds. A truce struck between the junta and President Fradique de Menezes included provisions for the creation of a new government and greater transparency in Sao Tome's dealings with the oil industry.

#### Even altered terms appear to be a sweet deal

ERHC's claims under the earlier agreement were altered following a dispute with Sao Tome, a former Portuguese colony with a population of around 140,000 and a small land mass about the size of Rhode Island, 372 square miles. Still, it appears to be a sweet deal for ERHC.

Under the revised agreement, ERHC gained the right to increase its participation in the Joint Development Zone. It formerly had a total 30 percent paid working interest in two blocks. Under the revised agreement, it has varying interests in six exploration blocks that total 125 percent. In exchange, the company relinquished its right to the overriding royalty, as well as a share of licensing bonuses and profits from other producers in the Joint Development Zone.

However, in the Sao Tome controlled Exclusive Economic Zone, ERHC would have the right to acquire a 100 percent working interest in two blocks of its choosing without having to pay any bonus, sub-

see PIONEER page A8

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## DEMAND

developing nations and to rising consumption there.

The IEA noted that global supplies rose in June by 1 percent, or 790,000 barrels a day, with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries accounting for 635,000 barrels of the increase.

Even so, prices for U.S. light crude shot to more than \$40 a barrel early in June on concerns about supply disruptions in Iraq and fears of a possible terror attack in Saudi Arabia, the IEA reported.

Prices slipped later in June, but uncer-

tainty about shipments from Iraq and Nigeria and legal difficulties for Russia's largest oil company Yukos contributed to fresh fears about supply and have helped push prices higher again early this month, the agency said.

Although industrialized countries' inventories of crude rose to more comfortable levels in May, inventories of gasoline and other refined products remained tight, it said.

Contracts of U.S. light crude for August delivery were trading July 13 at \$39.14 a barrel, down 36 cents, in electronic dealings in advance of the opening on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

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## PIONEER

ject to Sao Tome's reserving three blocks of its choice. Additionally, ERHC would have the right to acquire a 15 percent working interest in any two blocks in the Exclusive Economic Zone but would have to pay a share of the bonus. Sao Tome has yet to hold a licensing round of its own. As in the Joint Development Zone, ERHC also would not be precluded from bidding for additional working interest in any block in the Exclusive Economic Zone either alone or in partnership with other oil companies.

### ERHC supported financially by Chrome

Regarding Block 2 in the Joint Development Zone, ERHC chose to receive a 30 percent working interest requiring no signature bonus. A bonus of \$113 million was submitted by Foby Engineering. However, that bid has yet to be accepted or the block awarded. The only bid accepted thus far was for \$123 million (Block 1) from a consortium led by ChevronTexaco.

ERHC has said it relinquished its former rights so the licensing round could proceed, adding that its ability to participate in four blocks without having to pay signature

bonuses "improves any valuation of project economics to competition, capital resources, general economic conditions and other risks ..."

Pioneer could hook up with a company with virtually no money, shedding what few hard assets it once had to focus entirely on the Gulf of Guinea. In fact, ERHC has been operating in the red for some time, supported financially by Chrome.

Chrome Energy is part of the Chrome Group, a private holding company which has operating companies in Nigeria and the United States. It is involved in commercial banking, insurance, air transportation, power, telecommunications, oil and gas, and downstream petrochemical and refining, primarily in Nigeria.

ERHC reported a loss of \$616,378 for the first quarter of 2004 and a loss of \$698,588 compared to the same period a year earlier. The company generated zero revenues and further reported that its liabilities exceeded its assets by \$14.69 million. The company incurred a loss of \$3.15 million in fiscal year 2003 and a loss of \$4.08 million in fiscal year 2002.

"It is expected that the company will continue to borrow funds from Chrome in the future but there is no assurance that funds will be made available or under similar terms," according to ERHC's most recent quarterly report. The company said it was involved in negotiations with unspecified parties to raise cash for general operations and specific projects, presumably for its Gulf of Guinea prospects, "until such time as the company generates revenues sufficient to maintain itself as a viable entity."

### ERHC began in East Texas, Gulf of Mexico

Formed in 1996, ERHC began with about \$5 million in capitalization, aging production wells in East Texas, and a contract to remediate some 400 wells in the Gulf of Mexico. Former chief executive Sam Bass is said to have used his extensive international ties to help land the contract in Sao Tome, which at the time was emerging from years of political strife and financial problems. As part of the joint venture agreement, ERHC was to funnel \$1 per barrel of future production into a special fund to help educate the children of Sao Tome.

ERHC faced extinction in early 2000 when a group of disgruntled shareholders went to court in Colorado in an attempt to gain control of the foundering company from Arkansas investor Geoffrey Tirman, who laid claim to 80 percent of the company. Shareholders accused Tirman of reneging on an agreement to provide needed financing for ERHC and jeopardizing the company's prized contract with Sao Tome.

Tirman, who had little or no experience in the oil and gas industry, traveled to Sao Tome in an apparent effort to salvage the potentially lucrative oil contract, but ended up in a contentious encounter with government officials. A warrant for Tirman's arrest reportedly was issued after he departed the country.

Chrome, with its strong ties to Nigeria, took control of ERHC in early 2001 by acquiring a majority of ERHC shares. Pioneer's Paulsen said Sao Tome would be higher on the ladder of political risk than most countries Pioneer deals with but that the company is willing to take on a partner in the Joint Development Zone.

"We are trying to get a foothold in Africa and particularly in West Africa," he said, noting the company's early 2004 agreement with Kosmos Energy to jointly explore in a huge area along the west coast of Africa extending from Morocco in the north through Angola in the south, excluding Gabon where Pioneer already is active. Pioneer also is active in North and South Africa. ●

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**CANADA**

**Canadian minnow takes bold steps**

Endless Energy has boundless optimism, gaining shareholder approval June 28 to raise C\$30 million and spend it all on an East Coast offshore well.

In the process, the company will change its name to Marauder Resources East Coast and take a 50 percent interest in the Wolfville N-32 well, scheduled for spudding in the Balmoral block in the first half of 2005.

Endless President Jon Axford boldly told his annual meeting of shareholders that it "seems we're a slam dunk for 200 billion cubic feet." EnCana is the block's operator and 50 percent owner.

The acreage was picked up from Nova Scotia Resources, a Nova Scotia government corporation whose assets were sold to various buyers.

The Balmoral block is part of the Deep Panuke natural gas field, owned by EnCana, which suspended development plans last year while it explored more favorable economic options, including a possible tie in to the existing Sable gas field.

—GARY PARK, Petroleum News Calgary correspondent

**Nevada firm moves into oil sands**

Deep Well Oil & Gas, a Nevada-based corporation, has gained a foothold in Alberta's oil sands by acquiring 100 percent of privately held Mikwec Energy Canada for an undisclosed amount.

Once the deal closes, Deep Well will control a major heavy oil property, including an 80 percent working interest in 20,480 acres near Sawn Lake in north-central Alberta.

Preliminary work by Mikwec indicates more than 1.5 billion barrels of oil are in place, Deep Well said.

The Nevada company said exploration activities since the mid-1980s, combined with technological advances, have made the "previously bypassed resource economically attractive."

Deep Well said it plans to commence operations as an oil and gas E&P company, with special emphasis on heavy oil and gas exploration in northern Alberta.

Earlier this month, Deep Well appointed Menno Wiebe as chief operating officer. Wiebe has experience evaluating the oil sands as an employee of Hudson's Bay Oil & Gas. He has more recently held various overseas postings with Occidental Petroleum, Bow Valley Industries, Husky Energy, Hall-Houston Oil and Pertacal Energy.

—GARY PARK, Petroleum News Calgary correspondent

*Once the deal closes, Deep Well will control a major heavy oil property, including an 80 percent working interest in 20,480 acres near Sawn Lake in north-central Alberta.*



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**HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**Nabors cuts earnings estimate**

Nabors Industries Ltd. has cut its earnings estimate for the second quarter to 27 or 28 cents per share, 20 percent below the First Call mean estimate of 35 cents for each diluted share. And Nabors executives said July 1 that full-year profits will likely be 10 to 15 cents a share below previous forecasts. The second quarter will still come in well above 2003's 19 cents per share.

The company says its Alaska businesses are running slightly ahead of forecasts, and the same is true for U.S. well servicing operations. Rig counts and margins are up in the Lower 48 market, the company says. Canadian prospects suffered recently, though, with heavy rain dampening what started out as a rapid recovery from the spring thaw. The big negatives are in the international operations of Nabors, nominally based in Barbados. Bad weather meant higher rig-moving expenses in Mexico, and there were also problems in Colombia, Kenya and Trinidad. A jackup operating in the Arabian Gulf had 25 days of downtime.

U.S. offshore operations aren't improving as quickly as company executives expected, due to a weak market for workover jackups. Nabors expects the second half to be better in this area, but still below prior forecasts. Oil and gas operations are performing well, says Gene Isenberg, Nabors' CEO, with success in three of five recent exploration wells.

—ALLEN BAKER, Petroleum News contributing writer

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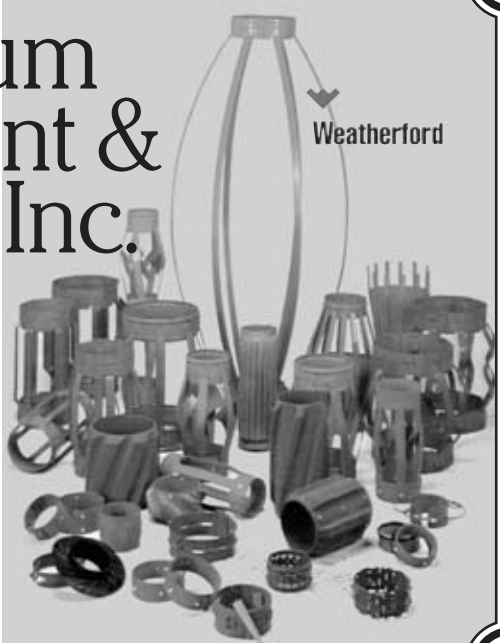




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## • CANADA

# Canada nudges land sales earnings up 10%

By GARY PARK

Petroleum News Calgary Correspondent

Sales of petroleum and natural gas rights across Canada slowed in the second quarter in two key markets — British Columbia and Saskatchewan — but governments still raked in a healthy C\$697 million for the first six months, up 10 percent from a year ago.

Evidence of intense competition for exploration prospects was reflected in the fact that 466 companies secured rights.

As usual, the dominant province was Alberta, which claimed C\$540 million of the total revenues, including a robust C\$334 million in the second quarter.

Average land values were the highest in almost 25 years in Alberta, hitting C\$388 per hectare (one hectare equals 2.471 acres) in the April-June period, surpassing British Columbia's C\$354.

Of the 5.02 million acres in rights sold in all jurisdictions to the end of June, Alberta accounted for 3.6 million acres, with coalbed methane prospects making a significant impact.

For the six months, British Columbia set the pace at an average C\$385 per hectare, compared with Alberta's C\$369 and Saskatchewan's C\$151.

In addition to the rights, total cash sales and work commitments reached 6.6 million acres, down from 6.89 million acres for the first half of 2003.

Contributing to that tally, the Northwest Territories fetched C\$125 million from the sale of 720,000 acres, while Nova Scotia granted rights to 342,000 acres, but did not release the work commitment dollars.

There was no sign of any flagging in Alberta's first sale of the second half when 405,000 acres changed hands for almost C\$49 million.

### Contact, EnCana among major players

Leading the successful bidders was broker Scott Land & Leasing, which spent C\$156 million acquiring 1.04 million acres for clients who kept their identities confidential.

The busiest companies were Contact Exploration, which accumulated 370,000 acres, the bulk from an onshore auction in New Brunswick, followed by EnCana, which added 342,000 acres to its portfolio, including a major work commitment in Saskatchewan.

Next in line were Paramount Resources, 335,000 acres; broker Standard Land, with a C\$53 million investment in 269,000 acres for anonymous clients; and Canadian Natural Resources, 90,000 acres.

Other major players in the hunt included Shell Canada, with an acquisition of 66,640 acres in British Columbia; Devon Canada, 38,320 acres; and Burlington Resources Canada, 34,650 acres. ●

## YUKON, OKLA.

### Superior Oil buys Barnett Shale lease, negotiating other deals in three states

Superior Oil & Gas Co. said July 12 that it has purchased a 112-acre lease from an undisclosed independent in Cooke County, Texas.

Superior said July 12 that the lease is in the prolific Barnett Shale field of North Texas and that it has obtained an option to acquire an additional 7,000 acres in Montague and Wise Counties, Texas. The acreage is an offset to a number of currently producing wells in the Barnett Shale formation, the company said.

Superior said it is in negotiations to purchase several producing oil and gas leases in Texas, Oklahoma and Colorado. The company said also it is in negotiations for the purchase of a natural gas transmission and gathering system in Texas.

—RAY TYSON, Petroleum News Houston correspondent

## ALBERTA

### California-based Fluor lands contract for Alberta oil sands venture

Fluor, the California-based engineering giant, has landed the first major contract for the Long Lake oil sands project in Alberta, a joint venture between OPTI Canada and Nexen.

The US\$570 million job extends Fluor's involvement since late 2001 in the front-end engineering for the first oil sands project to combine steam-assisted gravity drainage extraction technology with on-site upgrading.

Among other things, Fluor will undertake detailed engineering of three upgrader units.

Construction of the C\$3.2 billion project is scheduled to start later this year, targeting a July 2007 start-up and peak output of 58,500 barrels per day of light, sweet synthetic crude in the first phase. The Long Lake lease holds about 1.9 billion barrels of recoverable bitumen.

—GARY PARK, Petroleum News Calgary correspondent

*The US\$570 million job extends Fluor's involvement since late 2001 in the front-end engineering for the first oil sands project to combine steam-assisted gravity drainage extraction technology with on-site upgrading.*



## WESTERN COLORADO

### EnCana seeks to build natural gas wells in western Colorado

EnCana Oil and Gas said it plans to drill 114 natural gas wells over the next two years on 4,000 acres south of Rifle, Colo.

The company recently submitted a proposal to the Bureau of Land Management that calls for 80 wells on federal land and 34 on private land in the area.

The wells would be drilled from two existing locations and 18 new locations. Some well pads would support multiple drilling rigs.

"It's a natural extension of the work we've already been doing in and around Grass Mesa," EnCana spokesman Walt Lowry said July 6.

The BLM is conducting an environmental assessment of the plan through July 26.

The area is in Garfield County, one of the hot spots in energy development across the West. Industry officials say the county could see 5,000 to 10,000 new oil and gas wells over the next decade.

Last year, 566 permits were issued for new wells in Garfield County. So far this year, more than 200 have been issued, putting the county on pace for 700.

—THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## NORTH AMERICA

### North American rig count drops by 78 to 1,520

The number of rotary drilling rigs operating in North America during the week ending July 9 fell by a net 78 to 1,520 compared to the previous week but increased by 73 rigs versus the same weekly period a year ago, according to rig monitor Baker Hughes.

Canada accounted for the entire loss, falling by 84 rigs to 313 compared to the prior week. The number of rigs operating in the country during the recent week also was down by 69 when compared to the year-ago period.

The overall decline was partially offset in the United States, which gained a net six rigs from the previous week to total 1,207 and picked up 142 versus the year-ago period. Compared to the previous week the land rig count alone increased by seven to 1,092, while inland waters picked up one rig to total 19. Offshore, the rig count decreased by two to 96.

Of the total number of rigs operating in the United States during the recent week, 1,028 were drilling for natural gas and 177 for oil, while two were being used for miscellaneous purposes. Of the total, 740 were vertical wells, 330 directional wells, and 137 horizontal wells. California's rig count increased by three to 28 and Oklahoma's rose by three to 170. New Mexico picked up two rigs for a total of 68 and Alaska gained two rigs for a total of 10. The Texas rig count fell by four to 495 and Louisiana's fell by three to 167. Wyoming was unchanged at 85 rigs.

—RAY TYSON, Petroleum News Houston correspondent

## • NORTH SLOPE ALASKA

# Petro-Canada, Talisman expand North Slope presence

By KAY CASHMAN

Petroleum News Publisher & Managing Editor

**P**etro-Canada and Talisman Energy's U.S. subsidiary Fortuna Energy increased their land position on Alaska's North Slope at the June northwest National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska lease sale held by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. (See June 6 article in Petroleum News.)

Both Calgary-based companies had a North Slope acreage position before the sale, but the \$13,614,835 spent by Petro-Canada and the \$26,480,300 spent by Talisman in the June sale represented more than a simple acreage increase.

For Petro-Canada the move into the oil-prone NPR-A was a big step beyond the speculative gas-prone acreage it began picking up three years ago in the foothills of the Brooks Range.

For Talisman, which farmed into Total's NPR-A acreage last year as a minority partner, the June NPR-A sale leases represented its first acreage as an operator.

### Petro-Canada waiting on gas line, lawsuit

One of the largest producers of natural gas in western Canada, Petro-Canada's initial move across the border into Alaska was viewed as an extension of its natural gas activities in the Alberta foothills and Northeast British Columbia, where "geological prospects ... are similar" to those in Alaska, a company representative told Petroleum News at the time.

The company said it wanted to get its foot in the door in case a North Slope gas line was built.

That same year Petro-Canada, a member of the Mackenzie Delta Explorers Group, was the first to drill a natural gas-exploration well in the delta in more than a decade. (Devon Canada was a partner in that discovery.)

Aside from filling in around its acreage in the May state foothills sale and doing some field work, Petro-Canada's plan for its Brooks Range foothills acreage was to wait to see if a gas pipeline from the North Slope would be built to free the area's stranded gas. (See May 30 article in Petroleum News.)

That changed when the company made a successful bid for NPR-A leases in June, although Petro-Canada might be playing a different kind of waiting game for its NPR-A acreage.

Petro-Canada spokeswoman Susan Braungart told Petroleum News that the "oil prime" NPR-A acreage would give the company an additional base for operations in Alaska and possibly something to work on "while we await news on a gas pipeline."

She said, "We're interested in Alaska because we continue to see the area as highly prospective for both gas and oil."

Once the company has been assigned the leases it won in the NPR-A sale and if BLM wins a recent lawsuit filed by environmental groups against the northwest NPR-A sale, then Petro-Canada will decide what it wants to do with its NPR-A leases, Braungart said.

"We're hopeful that once the leases have been issued that the BLM will have resolved any legal issues with the leases and we can continue interpretation efforts with the data available," she said.

Derek Evoy, manager of frontier exploration for Petro-Canada, is in charge of the firm's Alaska assets.

### Talisman expects to drill well in winter of 2005-06

While Talisman's Fortuna faces the same lawsuit concerns, it still sees Alaska as a bright prospect in its group of international assets and expects to drill a well in NPR-A in the winter of 2005-2006.

David Mann, manager of investor relations and corporate communications for Talisman, told Petroleum News July 15, "The view within the company is that the next well we drill in Alaska will be in the winter of 2005-06."

When asked if the well would be on the acreage it shares with Total, the new NPR-A acreage in just picked up on the eastern edge of the northwest NPR-A planning area, or elsewhere, Mann said he didn't know.


"Obviously we already have seismic on the Total acreage where Total is the operator," he said, and no seismic has been shot in recent years on Talisman's new NPR-A acreage.

"And obviously we have our own views on geology and prospectivity," he said in regard to the 9,362 foot, Caribou 26-11 No. 1 well Total drilled on their joint acreage this past winter. (See July 4 article in Petroleum News.)

Mann said Petro-Canada "is in the middle of the budgeting and planning process right now," and is looking at all its "high impact, albeit higher risk

see PRESENCE page A14




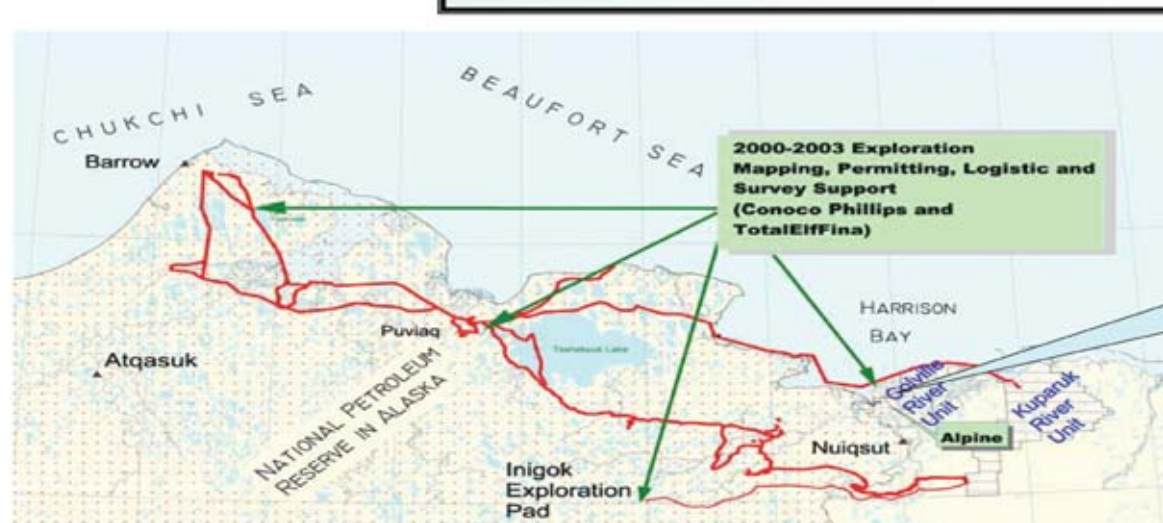


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## CANADA/ALASKA

### Calls for Alaska, Canada to form northern gas alliance

In agreeing to band together on energy issues, such as natural gas pipelines out of the Arctic, Canada's western and northern governments also indicated they would welcome Alaska's participation.

The premiers of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut agreed at their annual conference July 6-8 to cooperate in marketing their region as a "secure supplier of oil, gas and hydroelectricity" to North America, the Asia/Pacific and other global markets.

Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie said the first step towards an energy alliance of the provincial and territorial governments would also "include working closely with the state of Alaska."

The same case was made in Calgary July 9 by Alaska Gov. Frank Murkowski, who called for a northern gas alliance of Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, the Yukon and Northwest Territories to make a case to the U.S. and Canadian governments to develop northern gas.

A keynote speaker at an Interstate Natural Gas Association of America conference, Murkowski said consumers and industry stand to benefit from a pipeline to move North Slope gas to market.

Without a steady supply of Alaska gas to help keep pipelines out of Alberta operating at capacity in the decades ahead, Canadian producers could find themselves paying higher tariffs to get their own gas to market, he said.

Murkowski said it is no secret that pipelines out of Western Canada will have room in the years ahead as production declines in the Western Canada Sedimentary basin's mature fields.

He said neither Alaska nor Western Canada "can afford to wait indefinitely to begin commercializing northern gas," given the rising North American interest in imported liquefied natural gas.

"Alaska isn't looking to compete with Canada for market share, but rather to help maximize existing pipeline investments so that we can all share in a growing market," Murkowski said.

—GARY PARK, Petroleum News Calgary correspondent

## CALIFORNIA

### ConocoPhillips, Sound Energy sign MOU for LNG facility

ConocoPhillips and Sound Energy Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi Corp., said July 12 that they have signed a memorandum of understanding "to work jointly on the continuing development" of Sound Energy Solutions proposed liquefied natural gas import terminal at Long Beach, Calif.

Asked if ConocoPhillips would only be a gas provider or would also invest in the receiving terminal, ConocoPhillips spokeswoman Linsi Crain told Petroleum News that the roles of ConocoPhillips and Sound Energy Solutions "are currently being negotiated and

see **MOU** page A14

## • FORT YUKON, ALASKA

# CBM tests begin in village

State, federal and university team plans core drilling east of Yukon River village through known coal seams to test for gas

By PATRICIA LILES

Petroleum News Contributing Writer

Using a recently purchased core rig now owned by the state of Alaska, state, federal and university researchers plan their first drill program in late July to test the potential of coalbed methane for an energy source in a rural Alaska village.

One core hole will be drilled this summer on a site with known coal seams about one mile east of Fort Yukon, a village of about 800 residents on the Yukon River in eastern Interior Alaska.

Researchers hope to drill down to 2,400 feet, passing through two coal seams detected by prior seismic and drilling work, according to Jim Clough, geologist with the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys.

Tests will be conducted on-site this summer to test for the presence and the quantity of methane gas in the coal seams, he said, estimated to be each about 60 feet thick.

The work is scheduled to begin in late July and run for roughly two weeks, said Clough, an ardent advocate of developing coalbed methane as an energy source for rural Alaska villages.

Through its Arctic Energy Office, the U.S. Department of Energy is funding much of this summer's \$500,000 drill program, which includes financial matches from the state of Alaska and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Total DOE funding for the two-year program is \$700,000, with a cost share match of \$593,672, according to the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Arctic Energy Technology Development Laboratory.

Additional federal funding from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management allowed the state to purchase the Christiansen CS 1000 P6L core rig and accessory equipment, totaling \$267,344, Clough said.

The research team, made up of DGGs, UAF, geologists from the U.S. Geological Survey, BLM and GW Scientific, hopes to conduct additional core drilling for coalbed methane testing next summer at Fort Yukon, provided the work this year produces positive results.

The group has also applied for \$10 million in federal funding through U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, which, if approved, would allow additional drilling in Fort Yukon, as well as initial test drilling in two other communities, Clough said. "That's a lot of money so we could go and do more field work."

### Prior drilling produces gas shows

Fort Yukon was selected as the first coalbed methane test because of a prior, unrelated research hole drilled there 10 years ago, which encountered coal at 1,280 feet. When pulling samples up, those drillers observed bubbling and popping, indicating gas presence, Clough said.

Researchers plan this summer to re-enter that old hole using the slim-hole core rig, which can drill down to 3,000 feet. In addition to the coal seam at 1,280 feet, the group believes another coal seam is present at 1,600 feet, Clough said, based on 8.5 line miles of seismic data gathered in the area surrounding Fort Yukon by researchers in 2001.

That work indicates continuous coal seams in the area, including under the village, Clough said.

The state-owned drill rig, similar to models used in conventional mineral exploration work, will produce a 2.5-inch core sample. At the end of the drill test this summer, the group plans to ream out the hole to four inches in diameter and conduct hydrological tests on the formation.

### Reducing power costs in rural Alaska

Clough believes coalbed methane could solve the problem of high electric costs in rural Alaska. In Fort Yukon, electric power costs about 46 cents per kilowatt hour, more than five times the rate available in Alaska's largest communities. The community consumes about 360,000 gallons of diesel a year to produce that electricity, and burns another 260,000 gallons for home heating purposes.

Calculating a usage range and growth rate, the village's diesel consumption could be replaced by a coalbed methane project that produces 250,000 to 500,000 cubic feet of gas per day, according to the research team.

Estimated costs to develop such a project total \$5.064 million, according to the research project's presentation, although a more realistic range is \$8 to \$10 million, Clough said.

### Other villages offer potential sites

Fort Yukon is one of about 40 remote villages in Alaska that are on or near known coal resources. Two other communities, Wainwright on the North Slope and Chignik on the Alaska Peninsula, are also high priority targets for the coalbed methane exploration

see **CBM** page A13

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● INTERIOR AND EASTERN ALASKA

# Fires plague miners, prospectors

*Wildlands fires continue to burn through placer mine, hard rock prospecting areas*

By **PATRICIA LILES**

*Petroleum News Contributing Writer*

**A** number of wildlands fires continue to burn through the Interior and eastern part of Alaska, affecting placer miners and metals prospectors attempting to work during the state's short summer season. One area of impact is the Fortymile mining district, a historically significant gold producing area spread out along drainages of the Fortymile River, just west of the Alaska-Yukon border, south of the community of Eagle and northwest of Tok.

State records show 46 active placer mining operations in the area this year, according to Brent Martellaro, geologist with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources in the Division of Land, Mining and Water. Roughly one-third of those are permits for suction dredging on the Fortymile River, he said.

"The impact on a lot of placer miners has undoubtedly been no access, because the (Taylor Highway) road has been closed on and off for the last two weeks," he said. "Some of the largest fires have been in that region."

Actual damage reports to mining or exploration operations have not yet filtered back to the department for the Fortymile area, nor have reports for other placer mining areas off the Steese Highway, an area burned by the Boundary fire, which continues to threaten areas northeast of Fairbanks.

Gold production at the Fort Knox mine, about 25 miles northeast of Fairbanks, continues the week of July 12. Alaska's largest gold producer shut down on June 30, after fire managers issued an evacuation order for that area. Limited gold production resumed the next day and resumed at its full rate on July 3, general manager John Wild said.

According to Fort Knox spokeswoman Lorna Shaw, the mine's lost gold production during the shutdown was valued at

\$400,000, although the total cash loss to the operation was \$250,000. The mine's reduced usage of products consumed, such as electricity, fuel and reagents, made up the difference.

### Fort Knox operations normal July 14

Mine operations are running normally now, she said on July 14, although mine staff continue to attend daily fire briefings and are prepared for the fire to turn back toward Fort Knox. "The air is thick with smoke once again and the fire has not been put out. We've been fortunate that most of the spread has been in the opposite direction," Shaw said.

Regional exploration by Kinross Gold, the parent company for Fort Knox, has slowed this summer, also due to the fires. No equipment or materials have been damaged by fire, Shaw said. "We did, however, lose five crew days, 10 core drill shifts on the Fort Knox Pit (drilling) program and five

RC (reverse circulation) drill days at True North. The losses were due to access restrictions and smoke conditions."

That portion of the Boundary fire has not yet crossed the ridge north of Fairbanks Creek, which drains the hills just north and east of Fort Knox. A shuttered historical stamp mill called the Hi Yu has been spared, as has an inactive gold dredge near the confluence of Fish and Fairbanks creeks, Martellaro said. Other Fairbanks Creek area placer mine operations have reportedly resumed, he said, although he's attempting to determine whether the fire burned through the Kokomo Creek drainage, possibly damaging a placer operation there.

A new fire broke out the second week of July in the Crazy Mountains, west of the Yukon River village of Circle and north of the Steese Highway community of Central. Should the fire continue to spread to the southwest, it could threaten placer mining operations near Central, Martellaro noted. ●



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*continued from page A12*

## CBM

program.

Coal at Wainwright, detected by past oil and gas exploration, is known to be gassy, Clough said. But the costs to drill and develop that resource are higher than at Fort Yukon, he said.

DGGS also tested samples taken from a water well drilled to a depth of 720 feet near Chignik, in southwestern Alaska, almost two years ago. Although samples included carbonaceous shales, it did not encounter coal at that location, Clough said.

DGGS and USGS are also investigating coal resources in Cordova, McGrath and Unalakleet, through field studies this summer.

Originally, the group proposed drilling one test well at Fort Yukon in the first year of the program, then in the second year, drilling up to five wells in the Mat-Su area, in order to test production of coalbed methane using the slim-hole rig. That plan has been altered, due to a community outcry against coalbed methane production in the more populated area, according to the Arctic Energy Technology Development Laboratory's director, Dennis Witmer.

"The decision was made to go drill directly in Fort Yukon, where current energy prices are much higher and people actually want the gas," he said. "This had led to some changes in budget and scope, but the project is moving forward this summer." ●

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## WEST COAST

## California Web site on trade falls short

The California Energy Commission is touting an updated website, called Global Energy Connection, as a tool to promote international trade for California energy companies.

"The goal of the Global Energy Connection is to provide international and governmental contact information to energy businesses," according to a press release from the agency. "The new website is designed to remove barriers for California business and broaden the State's presence in the global energy market..."

But a review of the site so far indicates it has a long way to go to become a useful tool for industry.

One area of the site holds a list of companies in California that are offering their services to international clients.

Some familiar names appear on the list, such as Unocal and Texaco Exploration and Production, as well as Calpine, BP Solar, GE Hydro, Sempra Energy, and Solar Turbines, a subsidiary of Caterpillar. There are a few drilling service companies.

But the entries on the 124-page list are overwhelmingly heavy on alternative energy systems and consultants, most of them quite small. The agency cautions that "no attempt was made to screen companies contained in this directory according to their reputation, quality of product, services offered, or other such criteria."

The commission promises a project financing database and a service to put buyers and sellers together sometime in the future.

There's a tab on the home page labeled: "International Energy Project Financing: A listing of banks, institutions and government agencies involved in project financing." But that link contains no list, only a vague description of the challenge of getting financing.

It says the website offers a two-volume handbook on international energy project financing. But there's no link to the handbooks on that page.

The website touts programs such as its International Energy Fund, which gives out awards of up to \$25,000 for "the pre-investment activities of qualified small and medium-sized companies doing business in international markets." But the "awards" have to be repaid with interest once the companies have positive cash flow from a particular project.

The events calendar has listings for three conferences on solar, renewable and geothermal energy, plus the Vietnam Oil and Gas Expo.

If you think there might be something of interest on the website, the address is: <http://www.globalenergyconnection.ca.gov/>.

—ALLEN BAKER, Petroleum News contributing writer

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## PRESENCE

prospects," including the NPR-A. "Typically we finalize our budget in September or October. We think there is a lot of prospectivity in Alaska," he said, noting that the company was also looking at its portfolio of "higher impact, higher risk prospects, in Trinidad, Columbia and Qatar."

"We typically spend 5 to 10 to 15 percent of our capital budget on some of the larger, higher potential prospects. ... For an oil and gas company, a successful exploration program is the best way to add share-

holder value," Mann said. Talisman's capex budget is expected to be \$2.5 billion next year.

When asked if the company is looking at other investment opportunities in Alaska, he said, "It's a relatively new area for Fortuna, and indirectly for Talisman. We ... drilled the first well and are starting to get a feel for the play fairway in that part of Alaska. If there are attractive deals to be done, we'd be happy to do them."

John Thart, Talisman's executive vice president of international exploration, is in charge of the company's Alaska exploration program, Mann said. ●



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## ● CALIFORNIA

## Oil industry sues to block pollution standards on platforms

Association concerned action could set precedent for states to demand control over 4,000 Gulf of Mexico platforms

## THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

An oil industry trade group sued the California Coastal Commission to prevent it from enforcing ocean pollution laws on 22 drilling platforms that stand in federal waters offshore.

The lawsuit, filed July 7 in federal court in Los Angeles, seeks an injunction barring the commission from enforcing its regulations beyond the state's three-mile limit.

The suit contends that the commission has taken "illegal actions" and "abused and violated powers entrusted to them as California's coastal zone management agency." The commission "is trying to extend its authority into federal waters where it doesn't have authority," said Frank Holmes, a manager with the Western States Petroleum Association.

The state's standards on such matters as discharges of toxic metals and oily wastewater are stricter than federal requirements. But the lawsuit contends that the standards aren't approved under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act.

"It's part of the checks and balances," said Jocelyn Niebur Thompson, an attorney who filed the case. "We say the standards have to have been submitted and approved as written before they apply."

"This is a turf issue, and an attempt by oil companies trying to get around protecting water quality at a higher level," said Peter Douglas, executive director of the coastal commission.

continued from page A12

## MOU

will be formalized if a joint development agreement is reached."

Crain said ConocoPhillips "is looking to monetize its worldwide reserves of natural gas and deliver that gas to market. In this case, it would be Pacific Rim gas."

She noted the company is also developing two other LNG import facilities in the United States. ConocoPhillips said July 6 that it had finalized its transaction with Freeport LNG Development L.P. to participate in a proposed LNG receiving terminal in Quintana, Brazoria County, Texas. And in April the company applied to the U.S. Coast Guard for an LNG terminal in federal waters offshore Alabama in the Gulf of Mexico.

Sound Energy Solutions is proposing to

However, he said, many individual oil companies already have agreed to comply with the state standards.

## California could set precedent

The lawsuit could effect operations at nearly two dozen oil platforms between Santa Barbara and Orange counties.

Douglas contended that the industry is worried that if California standards can apply, it might create a precedent for other states to regulate about 4,000 oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Mexico.

The platforms off the California coast were granted discharge permits by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as far back as the 1970s but they have expired.

In December, the EPA issued a draft of proposed new regulations, which would reduce the amount of oil and grease the platforms could discharge and would require them to monitor waters for heavy metals and other pollutants.

The oil association applied for a new permit under the proposed regulations but the state Coastal Commission objected in March because the federal standards would not comply with a state ocean plan.

Meanwhile, the oil platforms have been allowed by the EPA to continue operating under the old rules.

Alexis Strauss, regional director of the EPA's water division, said she hoped a new permit would be issued by the end of July but the lawsuit could push back the date. ●

use a portion of Pier T at the Port of Long Beach — some 25 acres at Pier 126 — for a terminal capable of unloading LNG ships ranging in capacity from 90,000 cubic meters to 145,000 cubic meters, with send out capacity of 700 million cubic feet per day and a peak capacity of 1 billion cubic feet per day.

Sound Energy Solutions said it expects that some 70 vessels a year, about one ship every five days, would bring in LNG, primarily from the Pacific Rim.

There would be two 160,000 cubic meter cryogenic receiving tanks where the LNG would be temporarily stored in its liquefied state, natural gas liquids would be recovered and the LNG revaporized.

A new natural gas pipeline would connect the receiving terminal with the Southern California Gas Co.'s existing pipeline system. Sound Energy Solutions said the pipeline would be "constructed, owned and operated by a third party, not SES." A portion of the LNG would not be vaporized, but would be sold in its liquid state as vehicle fuel, the company said, with LNG trailer trucks transporting the LNG liquid fuel.

Sound Energy Solutions said the offloading dock, two LNG storage tanks, regasification facilities, equipment for recovery of NGLs and an LNG vehicle fuel truck-loading facility are estimated to cost about \$400 million. The facility is expected to be operational by 2007 or 2008.

—KRISTEN NELSON, Petroleum News editor-in-chief



## ALASKA



JUDY PATRICK

he trans-Alaska pipeline

### Alyeska schedules two summer maintenance shutdowns

The trans-Alaska pipeline, shut down at 6 a.m. July 10 for maintenance, was restarted at 1:30 p.m. July 11.

Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., which operates the pipeline on behalf of its owners, said it completed dozens of maintenance projects from Pump Station 1 at Prudhoe Bay to the Valdez Marine Terminal during the shutdown, which lasted approximately 30 hours.

The company said some of the most extensive work was a project at Pump Station 4, where a crew of more than 100 workers replaced two valves used to launch the pigs that perform a variety of tasks in the pipeline from cleaning pipe walls to detecting anomalies.

The F427 project also took "an orchestrated coordination of manpower and machinery," Alyeska said. Four crews set limit switches on valves at 10 sites along the pipeline. The limit switches, the company said, "assure valves open and close properly, shutting off or resuming the flow of oil upon command."

At Pump Station 3, crews changed out three valves associated with natural gas distribution, which is used to power pumps at stations 1, 3 and 4. The valves were replaced, Alyeska said, because they were nearing "completion of their natural life cycle."

There are line-wide shutdowns nearly every summer, allowing crews to work on projects along the pipeline, the company said. The July shutdown was scheduled to coincide with routine maintenance by North Slope producers of equipment and facilities. Crude oil shipment continued during the shutdown, with loading from storage tanks at the terminal.

Alyeska said a second shutdown, Aug. 16-17, is for preparatory work for electrification at some of the pump stations as part of the company's \$250 million strategic reconfiguration.

—PETROLEUM NEWS

*There are line-wide shutdowns nearly every summer, allowing crews to work on projects along the pipeline, the company said.*

## ALASKA

# Prince William Sound tankers have spill-free year

2003 is first year without spills since oil shipment began; state attributes record to modern tankers, better technology, better management

### THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tankers carrying North Slope crude oil out of Prince William Sound last year had their first spill-free year since they began shipping crude from the trans-Alaska oil pipeline terminal in 1977.

"It's a very notable achievement," said Larry Dietrick, director of spill prevention and response for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

He attributed the lack of spills to more modern tankers, better technology and better management in tanker operations.

Four tanker operators shipped about 330 million barrels — or 450 loads of crude oil — from the tanker dock at Valdez last year.

Alaska Tanker Co. carried oil for BP; Polar Tankers Inc., a subsidiary of Conoco Phillips, shipped oil for that company; SeaRiver Maritime Inc. carried oil for Exxon Mobil; and Seabulk Tankers hauled crude from Valdez to the Tesoro refinery at Nikiski.



The double-hulled tanker Polar Endeavour, which ships oil for ConocoPhillips

Anil Mathur, president of Alaska Tanker, based in Beaverton, Ore., said avoiding spills is a matter of good equipment, diligent inspections and rigorous management.

"People have to understand that our hazards never go away," said Mathur, whose company operates

see **TANKERS** page A16

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

# Regulatory agency opens probe of Shell refinery

By H. JOSEF HEBERT

Associated Press Writer

The Federal Trade Commission has begun a formal investigation of the proposed shutdown of a Shell Oil Co. refinery in California to determine possible antitrust violations, a senior FTC official said.

The refinery near Bakersfield, Calif., has been the subject of intense controversy as Shell officials plan to close the facility in November. The oil company said the refinery was being shut down because of a decline in oil production in the region.

But critics maintain the shutdown is part of a strategy to continue tight oil markets and increase California's gasoline prices, which already are the

highest in the country.

William Kovacic, the FTC's general counsel, said subpoenas have been served as part of the investigation.

"We regard this as a matter of particular urgency and importance," he said.

Shell spokesman Stan Mays said the company was cooperating with the investigation.

"It's nothing new," he said. "They have been evaluating our decision and we have been cooperating in that regard for several months. We will continue to answer any questions that they have."

He said the decision to close the refinery was a matter of economics.

see **PROBE** page A16

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## PROBE

"The refinery is a small, inland, inefficient refinery that can no longer compete with larger, sophisticated refineries ... typically located on the coastline," said Mays. He said the refinery has lost \$50 million over the last three years and faces \$30 million to \$50 million in upgrade costs.

### Investigation disclosed at price hearing

Kovacic disclosed the investigation at a hearing into high gasoline prices before a House Government Reform subcommittee, where lawmakers questioned why the FTC was not taking a more aggressive role in examining the Bakersfield refinery issue.

Democratic Rep. John Tierney noted that Shell obtained the California refinery when the FTC required, as part of a merger, that ChevronTexaco divest some of its facilities.

Kovacic said the formal investigation is

aimed at "examining possible antitrust implications" of the Shell refinery shutdown on California's gasoline market.

After the hearing Kovacic said the investigation would be conducted quickly in light of Shell's target date of closing the refinery by this fall.

He said that, depending on what is found, the FTC has a broad range of actions it might take, including challenging the shutdown or imposing various restrictions.

The Bakersfield refinery has a capacity of 70,000 barrels of crude a day. It has been producing 20,000 barrels of gasoline and another 15,000 barrels a day of diesel a day, Mays said.

Consumer groups have questioned the proposed shutdown.

A recent report released by Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, questioned Shell's claims of declining oil availability. He said ChevronTexaco, in fact, has plans to expand drilling in the Bakersfield area, a region that is the center of California's oil production. ●

continued from page A1

## ROWAN

The company said its overall offshore fleet was 98 percent utilized in June and has remained near 100 percent in July, adding that rig day rates also are on the rise.

"We believe these favorable trends will continue throughout the third quarter, barring any dramatic decline in oil and natural gas prices," Danny McNease, Rowan's chief executive officer, said July 15.

Rowan's average U.S. Gulf day rate of \$42,200 in the 2004 second quarter increased by \$2,500, or 6 percent, from the prior quarter, and by \$6,500, or 18 percent, from the year-earlier period.

The company said land rig utilization was 82 percent during the second quarter of 2004 versus 73 percent in the prior quarter and 76 percent in the year-earlier period. The average land rig day rate of \$11,400 during this year's second quarter increased by \$400, or 4 percent, from the previous quarter, and by \$800, or 7 percent, from the year-earlier period.

"We have continued to add to our backlog of drilling commitments in the Gulf of Mexico and, in many instances, have obtained day rate increases as our contracts have turned over," McNease said.

### Second-quarter loss of 2 cents per share

Still, the big contract driller said it incurred a 2004 second-quarter loss of \$2.1 million, or 2 cents per share, on revenues of \$190.9 million, a slight improvement when compared to a loss of 3 cents per share analysts had expected. That also compared favorably to a loss of \$6.6 million, or 7 cents per share, on revenues of \$158.1 million, reported in last year's second quarter. But the company stressed that all 25 of its offshore rigs were under contract for the first time in about six months, noting that two of its Gorilla rigs and one Super Gorilla class jack-up had been largely idle since January.

However, Gorilla V will conclude its current drilling assignment offshore eastern Canada within the next 30 days, the company said, adding that the rig will then be relocated to the North Sea for a one-well contract expected to span almost 11 months of drilling, mobilization and out-

fitting time and provide about \$38 million of revenues.

McNease said Rowan would continue "to aggressively pursue overseas opportunities" for its Gorilla and Super Gorilla-class rigs.

"We expect our departure from Canada to be temporary and believe that one of our Gorilla rigs currently positioned in the Gulf of Mexico could be relocated there by the second quarter of 2005," he said.

The company said it also is pursuing contracts for work offshore Qatar, Trinidad and Venezuela beginning later this year or in early 2005.

### Company has done much of ultra-deep shelf Gulf drilling

Moreover, Rowan announced that it was awarded a drilling contract by an undisclosed major integrated oil and gas company to drill an ultra-deep well in the relatively shallow waters of the U.S. Gulf's continental shelf.

Rowan, largely in pursuit of natural gas reserves, has drilled about two-thirds of all the wells drilled thus far in the U.S. Gulf in excess of 18,000 feet.

The one-well assignment is expected to begin in December 2004 or January 2005 and should last about one year, Rowan said. The company said it committed its newest rig to the project, the Tarzan Class Scooter Yeargain, subject to availability, or one of three other specialized jack-ups. Rowan expects revenues from the contract to range from \$28 million to as much as \$35 million, depending upon the rig utilized.

Revenues contributed by Rowan's manufacturing division during the second quarter of 2004 were the highest in their 10-year history, the company said, adding that its manufacturing backlog of \$58.5 million is up by almost \$42 million in the past year.

Included in Rowan's second quarter results were the effects of gains on helicopter sales, which reduced aviation operating expenses by \$4.8 million, and a \$4.3 million reduction in estimated airline revenue accruals following the introduction of a new passenger ticket tracking system. Collectively, the items had a negligible effect on the company's per share loss during the period.

—RAY TYSON, Petroleum News  
Houston correspondent



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## TANKERS

eight ships exclusively for the Alaska trade. His company encourages employees to report "near misses" in all operations.

"We have a policy that if you take care of the small stuff, the big stuff will not happen," Mathur said.

Oil loading and unloading are critical times, so ships that dock in Valdez are surrounded with containment boom before oil is loaded, Mathur said.

### Citizens' advisory council nominates operators for award

John Devens, executive director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, said the oil industry watchdog group views a year without spills as a significant milestone.

The council, which was formed in the aftermath of the 11 million-gallon Exxon Valdez spill in Prince William Sound in 1989, has at times been a sharp critic of the oil industry.

But the group has now nominated the Sound's four tanker operators for a Legacy Award from the Pacific

John Devens, executive director of the Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council, said the oil industry watchdog group views a year without spills as a significant milestone.

States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force.

Jean Cameron, the task force's executive coordinator, said that not only was no oil spilled in Prince William Sound, but the tankers didn't spill any in the waters of states where the oil was delivered.

She noted, though, that Alaska Tanker had a deck spill of about two gallons last year on the high seas of the Gulf of Alaska beyond state waters, and Seabulk spilled about 10 gallons of Cook Inlet crude oil.

In the past, Dietrick said, spills occurred on multiple occasions when cracks developed in the hulls of older, single-hulled ships.

Congress mandated double hulls after the Exxon spill, and the oil companies have begun putting the new, double-hulled tankers into service. ●



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## Business Spotlight

By PAULA EASLEY



FORREST CRANE

Bill Stamps, manager of business development/external affairs

## Peak Oilfield Service Co.

Peak Oilfield Service Co. specializes in drill rig moving, rig support, fluids hauling, ice and gravel road and pad construction and maintenance, general oilfield civil and mechanical construction, shop and field pipe, structural and truckable module fabrication, facility and equipment maintenance, and tank cleaning services. Its subsidiary, Precision Power, provides remote power generation service.

Bill Stamps has worked in the oil and gas industry for 30 years, both on and offshore, in construction and maintenance management. He's been with Peak 16-plus years. Bill is a past president of the Alliance and serves on its board; he also supports the Resource Development Council. Bill and Charlene have one four-legged child, Sobaka, at home. Their two-legged kids and grandkids live in the Lower 48.



FORREST CRANE

Noel Therrien, field superintendent

## Nordic Calista Services

Nordic Calista Services has operated in Alaska since 1982. It established a joint venture with Calista Corp. in 1985, and current services include drilling, work over, completion and coil tubing drilling on the North Slope.

Working his way up through the ranks to his current position, Noel Therrien has been with Nordic for 25 years, 14 of those in Alaska. During that time he received his MBA from the Ivey School of Business. Noel enjoys meeting the daily challenges of operating in the Arctic's harsh environment. With wife Roxann and sons Nick, Kyle and Tristen, Noel enjoys the challenges of Alyeska's ski slopes whenever possible. The boys are members of the Alyeska Ski Team and Noel serves on the club's board.



continued from page A1

## KERR-MCGEE

planned for this winter, although Summers has retired and Kerr-McGee is in the process of finalizing who will alternate with Durkee this winter.

The Kerr-McGee (70 percent), Armstrong Oil & Gas (30 percent) Nikaitchuq unit is at Spy Island, north of Oliktok Point and the Kuparuk River unit and northwest of the Milne Point unit. Armstrong Oil & Gas's Tuvaq unit is immediately to the west of Nikaitchuq, and Pioneer Natural Resources-Armstrong Oil & Gas Oooguruk unit is immediately to the west of Tuvaq (see story in June 13 issue of Petroleum News).

### Sag River discovery made last winter

Kerr-McGee drilled two wells in what is now the Nikaitchuq unit last winter, and the company said in April that the Nikaitchuq No. 1 production tested more than 960 barrels per day of 38 degree API oil from the Sag River formation. The company said that if the prospect is developed "horizontal wells would most likely be utilized, which would be expected to produce at higher flow rates than the vertical well." The Nikaitchuq No. 2, drilled 9,000 feet southwest of the No. 1 well, "successfully extended the accumulation down dip," the company said, although the second well was not tested.

"This plan is to fully evaluate the Sag River this year, to know whether we have something to go ahead with or not," Durkee said.

"We either make a decision to move forward after this year's drilling season or not," he said.

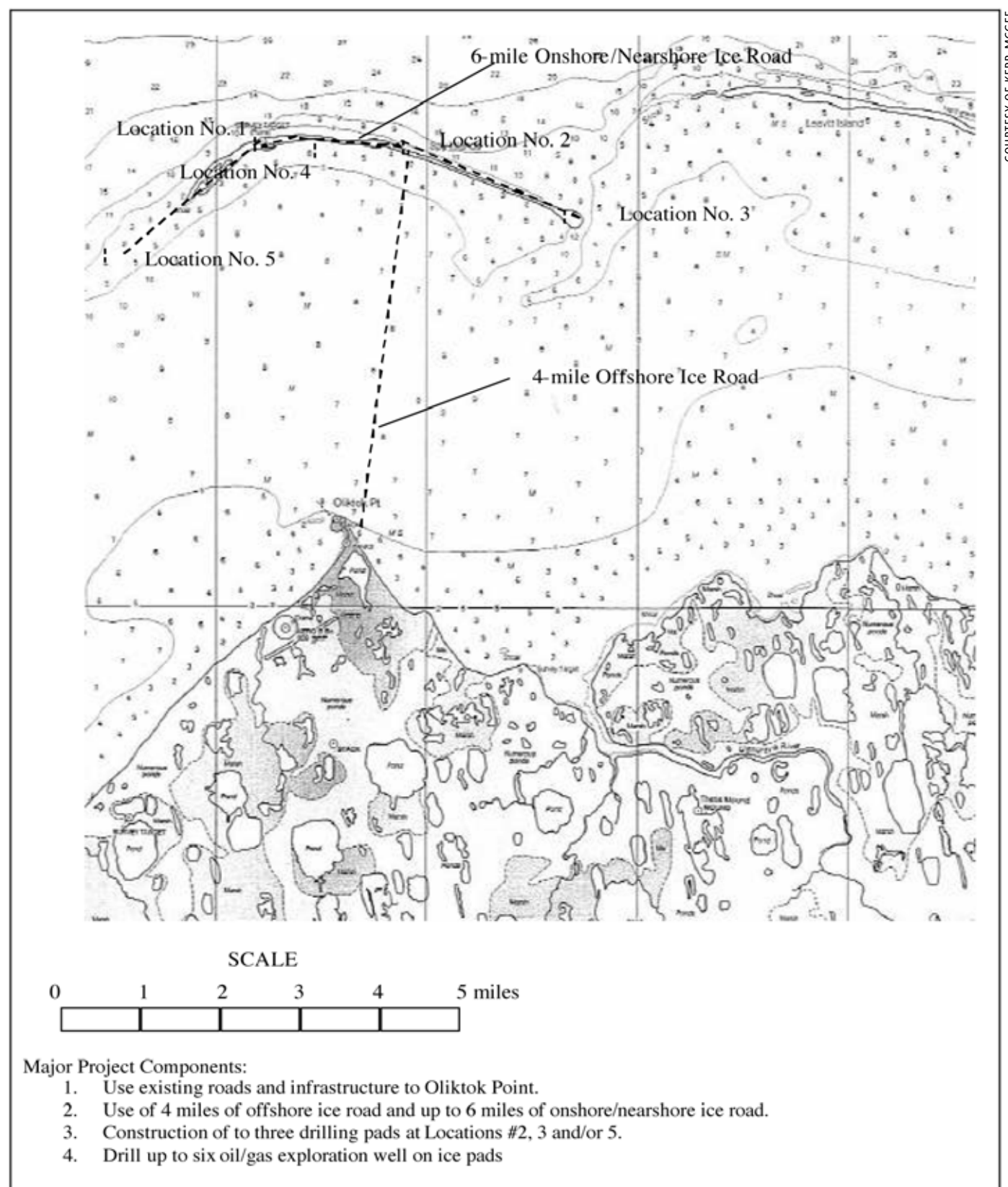
"We intend to fully evaluate the Sag River formation discovery the company made last winter season."

The internal goal, he said, is to have a decision "as soon as possible so we can go out to our vendors." Durkee said he thinks a decision on the Alaska winter program should be made "in the October timeframe."

### New work to begin in December

Kerr-McGee told the state it expects ice road and pad construction for this winter's wells to begin as early as Dec. 10, and drilling to begin on or before Jan. 20.

The main ice road will run north from Oliktok Point toward the south side of Spy Island. Mostly seawater and ice chips will be used for the road and drill pads, and will be built up until grounded ice is obtained. Pads on the island will be built in a similar fashion. The ice pads on grounded ice (in approximately two to three feet of water) will be built up so there is two to three feet



of freeboard.

Approximately four miles of ice roads will be constructed in water depths ranging from one to eight feet and another six miles will be built on or immediately adjacent to Spy Island. Of five proposed pad locations, wells may be drilled from as many as three this winter. Nikaitchuq No. 1 was drilled from location No. 2 near the middle of Spy Island last winter; Nikaitchuq No. 3 and No. 4 may be drilled from an ice pad at that location this winter.

Nikaitchuq No. 2 was drilled from location No. 3 near the eastern end of Spy Island

last winter; Nikaitchuq No. 5 and No. 6 may be drilled from an ice pad at that location this winter; Nikaitchuq No. 7 and No. 8 may be drilled this winter from location No. 5 off the western end of Spy Island.

Pad sizes would be approximately 400 feet by 800 feet at locations No. 2 and No. 3, and 400 feet by 400 feet at location No. 5.

"All construction will take place on the Beaufort Sea ice in state waters or on Spy

Island," Kerr-McGee said in its operations plan.

In addition to exploratory drilling, the company said it may also do vertical seismic profiles to confirm geologic structures, tests which would typically be conducted at the end of drilling, as they entail placing a seismic source such as an air gun beneath the ice near the well and measuring sound returns in the bore hole. ●

continued from page A1

## DEALS

from the mid-1990s to replenish their dwindling natural gas supplies at bargain-basement prices, have struggled to deliver results from the basin.

Some of the observers blame that failure to deliver material growth on a per share basis from the Western Canada Sedimentary basin on top-heavy bureaucracy in the U.S. firms and decisions by those companies to unload skilled employees who had a wealth of information about the basin.

### Fundamental restructuring

What is happening is a fundamental restructuring of the business in Western Canada, which has witnessed a pullout from conventional plays by the traditional giants — such as Imperial Oil, Shell Canada, Petro-Canada and Chevron Canada — who see no value in administering scattered properties and see no prospects of any future large-scale finds.

Over the last year they have been joined

by an exodus of major U.S.-based players — Marathon Oil, El Paso, Murphy Oil, Vintage Petroleum, Anadarko Petroleum and Calpine.

In the process they have opened the doors to every group remaining in the Canadian industry — large E&P companies, income trusts, junior producers and start-ups. The competition for assets has been intense, with Calgary-based energy consultant Sayer Securities noting in a recent report that traditional E&P players have shouldered aside the aggressive trusts this year.

Feasting on unprecedented cash flows and enjoying a surge in share values, the E&P firms bought companies and properties valued at C\$2.8 billion in the first quarter, or 74 percent of the industry's total transactions, Sayer said. In 2003, the E&Ps and trusts split the deals almost equally.

If that trend continues, observers suggest the E&Ps will chase the major targets, forcing the trusts to seek partners if they want to compete for big ticket items.

Not that the trusts have faded from the

see **DEALS** page A19



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**DEALS**

scene.

In the year's richest deal to date, Enerplus Resources fund and Acclaim Energy Trust carved up the bulk of Chevron Canada's Western Canada properties in a C\$1.09 billion deal in late May.

Enerplus paid C\$466 million and Acclaim C\$434 million for Chevron assets, although the two quickly spun off C\$189 million to Paramount Resources.

The next wave of sales involves EnCana, Anadarko, Vintage and Calpine.

In the past 12 months the major deals that have been concluded and those now entering the market are:

- August 2003: Marathon Oil sells its Canadian unit to Husky Energy for C\$588 million. Of the 27,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day and 39.8 million boe of reserves, Husky unloaded 7,500 boe/d to EOG Resources for C\$320 million.

- February 2004: El Paso does a C\$346 million deal with BG Group, the British-based company born out of a merger of Centrica and British Gas. In returning to Canada after an absence of a decade, BG has gained a foothold with 132 billion cubic feet of reserves in Alberta and British Columbia producing 80 million cubic feet per day and, more importantly, 630,000 acres of undeveloped land.

- April 2004: Murphy Oil walks away from Western Canada's conventional fields after a two-way deal. Pengrowth Energy Trust paid C\$550 million for 46 million boe of heavy oil, light oil and gas properties, producing 15,500 boe/d, while Canadian Natural Resources acquired the balance, including 68 million cubic feet per day of gas output and 395,000 undeveloped acres, for C\$280 million.

- May 2004: ChevronTexaco unveiled a C\$1.09 billion, three-way transaction, with Enerplus Resources Fund paying C\$466 million for 11,500 boe/d and Acclaim Energy Trust pumping C\$433.7 million to gain 17,000 boe/d. The trusts immediately unloaded 140,000 net acres, 10,000 boe/d of production and 22.2 million boe of reserves for C\$189 million to Paramount Resources. But ChevronTexaco's Canadian unit will retain its big frontier assets — Mackenzie Delta, Athabasca oil sands and East Coast offshore.

- May 2004: ExxonMobil and Apache formed a joint-venture E&P in a US\$385 million arrangement to produce 10,000 boe/d. In Western Canada, Apache will drill more than 250 wells on almost 300,000 acres of undeveloped properties, leaving ExxonMobil to collect a 37.5 percent royalty on the Canadian properties and a 35 percent interest in production.

- June 2004: Vintage Petroleum announces plans to sell its Canadian assets for a projected C\$500 million. Proved reserves at year-end 2003 were 67 billion cubic feet of gas and 3.5 million barrels of oil, with total output last year of 3.94 billion cubic feet of gas and 235,000 barrels of oil.

- June 2004: Anadarko launches what could be the blockbuster sale of all in this wave, offering a possible US\$1.45 billion in non-core Canadian holdings, putting 41,500 boe/d on the block as part of a US\$2.5 billion asset offering.

- June 2004: Calpine looks for buyers for 230 billion cubic feet of Alberta natural gas reserves valued at about C\$540 million and says it may also shed its 20 billion cubic feet of reserves in Calpine Natural Gas Trust.

On top of that, EnCana is marketing stakes in 12 non-core oil and gas fields over the balance of 2004, hoping for proceeds of US\$1.4 billion. With combined output of 40,000 boe/d, the sale is being conducted in an open auction format.●



continued from page A1

**ARMSTRONG**

gravel road system.

The ice road will be built "to either the abandoned West Sak 18 gravel pad or an ice pad constructed adjacent to the gravel pad."

Unlike the past two North Slope exploration seasons when Armstrong was a non-operating partner in drilling prospects it had developed, this time the company will be the operator at Two Bits, Stu Gustafson told Petroleum News July 13. Gustafson, Armstrong's vice president of operations, said success at Two Bits would give Armstrong, which began buying leases in the state in October 2001, its first production in Alaska, and demonstrate that smaller accumulations can be economic to develop.

Finding oil at Two Bits wouldn't just be a win for Armstrong, Gustafson said. "If Two Bits works, there's not enough drill rigs (on the North Slope)." Success at Two Bits, he said, would be better for the industry than discovery of a huge new field, because it would mean companies can make money from developing smaller fields that the 50 million-barrel size that is the standard now.

**Paradigm cracking**

The lure of cracking the 50-million

barrel paradigm was what brought Armstrong Oil and Gas to Alaska where it founded Armstrong Alaska, Bill Armstrong, president of both companies, told the Resource Development Council of Alaska in November 2002. At that time the company was preparing, with operating partner Pioneer Natural Resources, to drill its first North Slope wells on a prospect that Armstrong developed.

Armstrong told the council's annual conference that the company came to Alaska because it believes the state's agreement with the North Slope producers, the Charter for Development of the Alaskan North Slope, will make facilities access possible for independents, now that production is declining and there is room in those facilities for more oil.

Alaska looks like the Gulf of Mexico looked in the 1970s, when production was declining, the majors were looking for better opportunities elsewhere and the Gulf offshore was believed to be "too complicated and too expensive for independents," he said.

Today the Gulf of Mexico is "home to dozens and dozens of highly competitive independents," Armstrong said, as well as the majors, and is characterized by technical advancements, good profitable jobs and new ways of looking at the geology. "It's a lot different than they thought 30 years prior," he said.

Alaska is "arguably the best petroleum

system in the entire world," Armstrong said, but to find more fields, "you've got to drill wells. You can't find new fields without drilling new wells."

To date, Gustafson said, Armstrong and the operating partners it has brought into the state have had an 80 percent success rate with drilling.

**Kuparuk extension the target**

Matt Furin, the Armstrong vice president in charge of geoscience, told Petroleum News July 13 that the company picked up the Two Bits tract looking "to extend the Kuparuk field ... Cretaceous section ... farther to the west."

"With ideas that Stu (Gustafson) has, what we're trying to do is significantly lower the reserves threshold for economic development around the North Slope fields."

Most of the things Armstrong has gone after on the North Slope, where it has partnered in the shallow waters of the Beaufort Sea with both Pioneer Natural Resources (2002-03 exploration wells) and Kerr-McGee (2003-04 exploration wells), have been larger, Furin said. Traditionally the economic threshold has been 50 million barrels on the North Slope.

What Armstrong is looking for west of Kuparuk is 15-30 million barrels.

see **ARMSTRONG** page A20

COURTESY OF ARMSTRONG ALASKA



continued from page A19

## ARMSTRONG

The ultimate goal, Furin said, is to get that economic threshold for making money on the North Slope down to 10-20 million barrels.

It's equivalent to what was done in the North Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, Furin said.

It is also part of Armstrong's testing of North Slope paradigms of geology, of economic threshold and of the time it takes to get to the drilling stage.

The company's tactic, he said, is "just attacking things one bite at a time... If you take them all at once they're overwhelming."

The Two Bits project is "just an extension" of what Armstrong has been doing on the North Slope, Furin said, and the most exciting thing about it is "the implication for lowering the commercial threshold. That's what we're trying to do. Once we attack that it doesn't have to be just huge independents" working on the North Slope. The process of moving from all majors to majors and independents took about seven years in the Gulf of Mexico, he said, and noted that Jim Weeks of Winstar Petroleum "laid the groundwork on the North Slope ... (and) hopefully we can start where he left off and carry it forward."

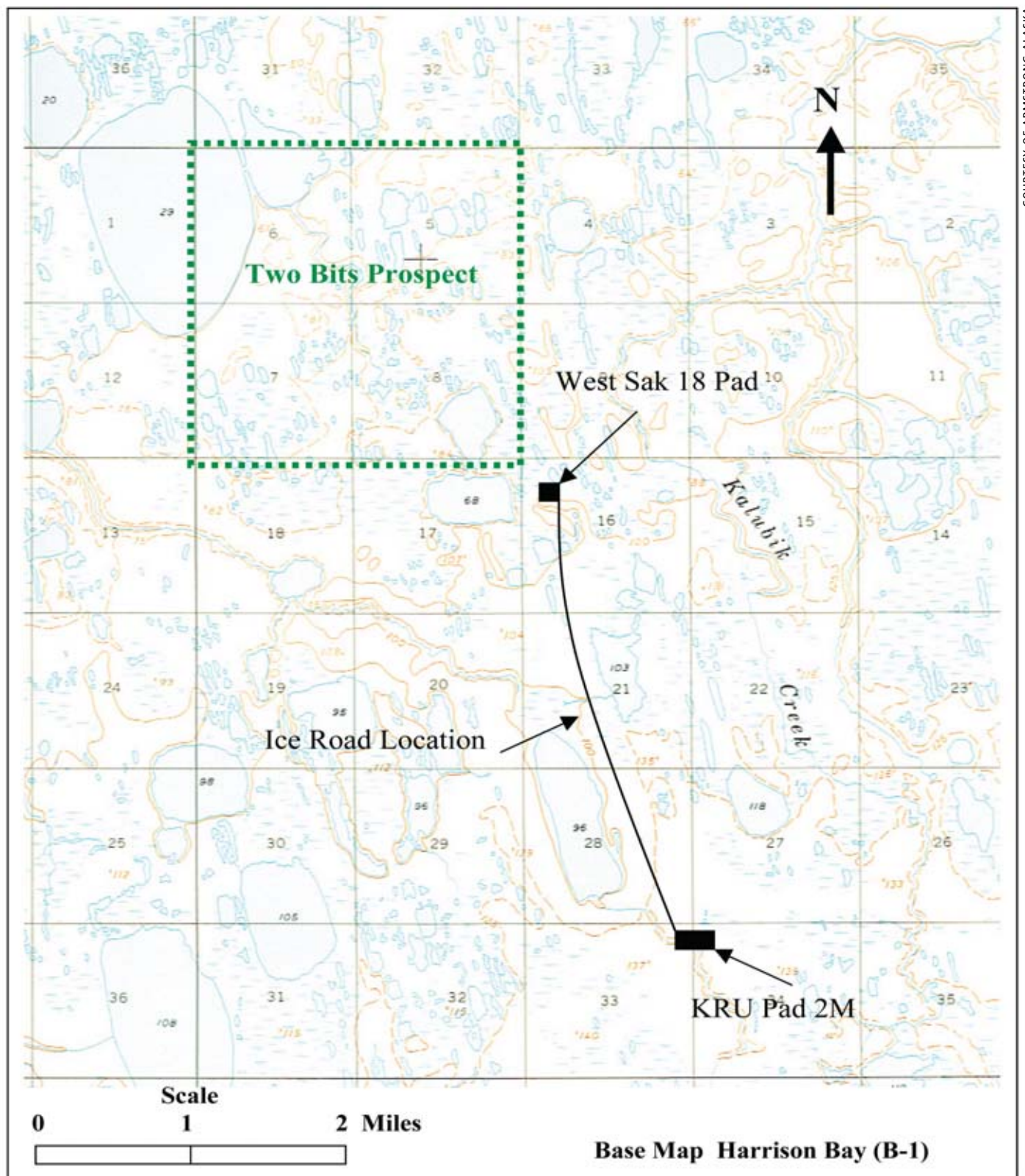
He said the company has been talking with ConocoPhillips, and has "a great dialogue" going with them. "And we need them and others to work with us."

### There is a gravel pad

Gustafson said the existing gravel pad, inside the Kuparuk River unit just east of Two Bits, is the West Sak 18, a 75,000-cubic yard gravel pad built in 1980, and abandoned since 1981. "The useable area on the pad is approximately 300 feet by 450 feet," the company told the state in its operations plan, and if the gravel pad is not available, the company said it would build an ice pad about that size adjacent to the gravel pad.

Gustafson said the company will be going out for service tenders for the exploration work, including the rig, in August.

The ice road and pad construction will begin as soon as the company has finalized certain agreements with ConocoPhillips, received its permits and approvals and weather conditions allow,



with ice road and pad construction expected to begin as early as November or December.

"Drilling should begin during December on the first exploratory well," the company said in its operation plan.

Gustafson said they will spray the ice road and use low-pressure footprint

vehicles so that work can begin as soon as possible. Spraying is a more expensive way to go, he said, but it will allow them to start work sooner. "If we don't have to build an ice pad," he said, the company believes it can start drilling in December, and "have our first two wells done before anybody else starts building

ice roads."

The wells will be directionally drilled to the northwest to the Armstrong lease, and depending on results of drilling, wells may be either plugged and abandoned or "left in a condition to permit the well to be produced," the company said.

Gustafson said the company is talking with ConocoPhillips about processing whatever oil is found through the Kuparuk facilities. "They have been very good to work with," he said.

And, he said, if the wells are successful, the company plans to use the "production in a box" system he has proposed, fabricating metal boxes to go around the wellheads. No boxes have yet been fabricated.

"We're still working on the box," Gustafson said. ●

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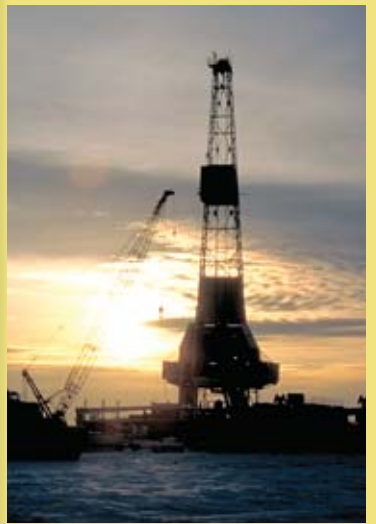
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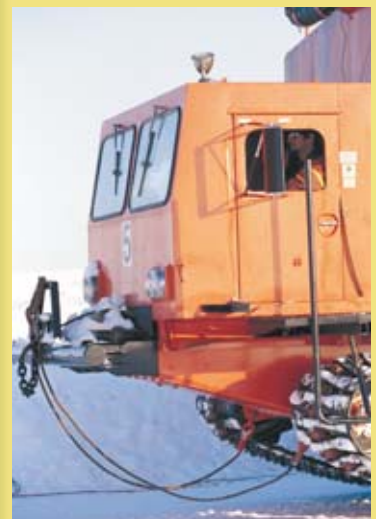
## UpFront

A Nabors Drilling employee takes part in a workover at one of the company's rigs on Alaska's North Slope

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# B

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Petroleum  
news

Volume 9, No. 29  
July 2004



# Charter jets save time and trouble

*Northwestern offers its charter passengers speed, comfort and flexible travel arrangements*

By **ALAN BAILEY**

*Petroleum Directory Contributing Writer*

**F**or many people, traveling to some remote location in their personal Learjet may seem a far-fetched idea. But there are many situations where this type of travel can prove both practical and cost effective.

Northwestern, an air charter company based in Anchorage, Alaska, provides customized jet transportation for people who need to get to places quickly, conveniently and in comfort.

"Here at Northwestern we not only provide air service as far as getting a person from point A to point B but we do it very professionally and we do it with customer service," Captain Patrick Murray, Northwestern's director of marketing, told Petroleum News.

Northwestern is the charter division of Northwestern Arctic Air, an air ambulance service also based in Anchorage. Northwestern Arctic Air began its Anchorage operations in 1998, Murray said.

With three jet aircraft based in Anchorage Northwestern can respond to most transportation requests in and out of Alaska and within the state.

"We've got three jets in Anchorage — two Learjets and a (Cessna) Citation," Murray said.

The Anchorage-based aircraft are equipped for flying in and out of gravel airstrips. And with a team of about 15 pilots the company can dispatch aircraft quickly and on short notice.

Northwestern Arctic Air also provides air ambulance services for Providence Hospital in Anchorage. The air ambulance operation has two dedicated aircraft: a Learjet and a King Air turboprop. The program has carried out medevacs from as far afield as Russia, South America and Indonesia.

Speed is essential.

"When the pager goes off I have to be in the air in less than 50 minutes," Murray said. "We're very used to doing things quickly ... we've got protocols set up to get us in the air."

## Efficient, cost-effective, safe charter

Northwestern applies this rapid response to its air charter operations — customers can call the company's 24-hour phone number to obtain an immediate answer to a transportation need.

"If someone calls up and says 'hey, what would it cost to go (from Anchorage) to Los Angeles ... we want to be there in five hours' ... we'll give them a quick quote and tell them that we can be in the air in an hour to an hour and a half," Murray said.

As well as benefiting from this type of fast, flexible service, customers can enjoy all of the amenities of a private jet.

Northwestern provides comfortable aircraft seating and in-flight items such as food, drinks, newspapers and magazines.

"We feel it's very important in order for people to get the full atmosphere, to be treated like executives, CEOs," Murray said. "That's what we try to provide for customers. We carry their bags on, give them the red-carpet treatment."

Northwestern caters to business people who need to reach a destination quickly. However, the company serves anyone who wants the convenience and comfort of charter travel. For example, some people use air charter to go on vacation — they're happy to pay to get to a destination quickly, avoiding the usual airport lines, being wined and dined on the way and avoiding any possibility of lost luggage.

"We have clients who want to go fishing and they're down in the Lower 48," Murray said. "We've got a trip here in about a week where we're going to send a Learjet down to Idaho, pick up a bunch of people and fly them back to the Kenai Peninsula."



ALAN BAILEY  
Captain Patrick Murray of Northwestern with one of the company's Learjets

## Custom travel

As well as speed and comfort, chartering an aircraft brings flexibility in travel arrangements. The aircraft can make an unscheduled stop, change routes, change destinations or remain with a customer for an overnight trip.

"That's the nice thing about air charter. When we're en route ... we have that option," Murray said. "It's your airplane — we're here for you. If you want to go any place, just let us know."

Although this type of custom flying isn't cheap, the cost per passenger depends on how many people are on the aircraft — with a full quota of passengers the cost can turn out quite a bit lower than people might expect. And then for business people, where time translates to money, the

in a single jet flight from Anchorage, this type of flightseeing opens up endless possibilities for visitors with limited time in the state.

"We can get you there really quick and when we get there we put the flaps down, put the landing gear down, whatever to slow us down a bit, so you can actually view it at slower speed," Murray said.

## Niche destinations

Customers find Northwestern's charter operations especially valuable when traveling to destinations that lack frequent scheduled airline service. For example, the company has established a niche business flying to some of the more remote islands in the Aleutians.

"It's not unusual to have flights for five or six (fishing industry) CEOs heading down to places like Dutch Harbor," Murray said.

Charter flights can also prove the best option for activities such as fishing vessel crew changes, where people need to be at a specific place at a specific time, he said.

The Russian Far East has become another specialty destination for Northwestern — the company has flown to places such as Sakhalin Island, Magadan and Vladivostok.

"We've had an influx of calls over the last six months ... saying 'we need to get to Sakhalin Island — have you taken people out there?'" Murray said.

Northwestern pilots regularly working both air ambulance and charter operations maintain active experience of flying to these niche locations. And that type of experience can prove invaluable in an area like the Aleutians, where strong winds and poor visibility challenge flying skills and judgment.

## Safety

In fact Northwestern places safety at the top of its priority list — all pilots have to establish an appropriate amount of Alaska experience and substantial flight time before commanding an aircraft.

"We've got very, very high minimums — like 5,000 hours for a captain," Murray said.

And the company's pilots undergo several days of simulator training in Texas twice a year, to brush up their technique and practice dealing with emergency situations.

With a thriving and expanding business, Murray sees a growing need for air charter in Alaska — Northwestern will soon take delivery of a new Cessna jet that can operate out of shorter airstrips than the other aircraft in the company's fleet.

"We're getting the calls. We're getting the flights," Murray said. "So, if we get to a point where our airplanes are always gone ... we're just going to have to put more aircraft on our certificate."

So, it seems that more and more people see the advantages and practicality of chartering a jet. 1

*Editor's note: Alan Bailey owns Badger Productions in Anchorage, Alaska.*



ALAN BAILEY  
Murray in the cockpit of one of the company's Learjets

timesavings may more than offset the charter cost.

As well as carrying passengers, Northwestern can ship items of express freight — items that require immediate delivery. Express air packages have included organ transplants and critical pieces of oilfield equipment, Murray said.

## Flightseeing

In what is perhaps the ultimate in custom jet travel, Northwestern has started offering flightseeing tours.

"We offer flightseeing anywhere," Murray said. "That's the beautiful thing about air charter ... if someone wants to go down to Katmai National Park or view McNeil River Falls, we can do that."

Since it's possible to reach almost anywhere in Alaska



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#### Pacific Environmental (PENCO)

6000 A St.  
Anchorage, AK 99518  
Contact: Tom Ulrich, reg. mgr. American Maine svc. group  
Phone: (907) 562-5420  
Fax: (907) 562-5426  
Email: alaska@amsghq.com  
Web site: www.amsghq.com  
PENCO provides environmental response, containment and clean up. Hazardous wastes and contaminated site clean up and remediation. Asbestos and lead abatement. Petroleum vessel services and bulk fuel oil facility and storage tank maintenance, manage-

ment and operations.

#### Unitech of Alaska

2130 E. Dimond Blvd.  
Anchorage, AK 99507  
Contact: Debbie Hawley  
Phone: (907) 349-5142  
Phone: (800) 649-5859  
Fax: (907) 349-2733  
Email: unitech@alaska.com  
Email: dhawley@unitechofalaska.com  
UOA is Alaska's only 24-hour oil spill remediation, environmental and industrial supply company. Specialty areas include sorbents, geotextile, containment berms, drums and ice melt.

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#### Equipment & Heavy Hauling

#### Alaska Interstate Construction

P.O. Box 233769  
Anchorage, AK 99523  
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Fax: (907) 562-4179  
Email: info@aiclcc.com  
Website: www.aiclcc.com  
AIC provides cost-effective solutions to resource development industries. We provide innovative ideas to meet each requirement through the provision of best-in-class people and equipment coupled with exceptional performance.

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Anchorage, AK 99501  
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Fax: (907) 276-6786  
Email: lleary@carlilekw.com  
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#### Crowley Alaska

2525 C St., Ste. 303  
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Contact: Craig Tornga  
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Phone: (800) 234-8683  
Fax: (907) 278-9689  
Email: cstoner@totemocean.com  
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Phone: (907) 283-7975  
Fax: (907) 283-3677  
Email: glend@wbialaska.com



# MWH focuses on the environment

*The company's services range from environmental consulting to building environment-related facilities*

By **ALAN BAILEY**

*Petroleum Directory Contributing Writer*

In recent years people have become increasingly aware of the impact of human activity on the earth's environment. As a result the development and operation of industrial, commercial, military or residential infrastructure now requires a high level of environmental knowledge, planning and design.

MWH Global Inc. addresses these environmental issues through its international business operations focused on environmental consulting, engineering and construction. MWH is a private, employee-owned company with about 6,000 employees worldwide.

"MWH was formed in 2002 by the amalgamation of two long-standing engineering firms, Montgomery Watson and Harza Engineering company," Brett Jokela, MWH's Alaska regional manager, told Petroleum News. Montgomery Watson's history in civil environmental engineering stretched back to the 19th century, Jokela said. Harza Engineering had established an international reputation for the development of hydroelectric power stations.

The company's staff of 50 in Anchorage, Alaska, forms part of MWH Americas Inc., the division of MWH Global that supports North and South America. Alaska clients include local, state and federal government; the oil and gas industry and the mining industry.

## Environmental compliance

Compliance with environmental standards and regulations forms a critical part of any environmentally responsible activity. And through environmental assessments, planning and monitoring MWH's experts can help clients understand the environmental impacts of new developments, obtain permits and assure operational compliance.

Janet Sheldon, a senior project manager with MWH, said that a major component of the company's compliance work involves facilitating a dialogue between clients and the regulatory authorities. Doug Quist, a senior chemist with MWH, sees this facilitation as a key benefit for the clients.

"When we go in and talk about a new environmental permit or a new wastewater



MWH has removed nearly 300 tons of solid waste debris including drums containing waste fuels and hazardous waste from orphan exploratory sites scattered between the foothills of the Brooks Range and Prudhoe Bay.

clients understand how the regulations apply in different situations.

"Sometimes, based on other projects we've done, we'll know that there's a different interpretation (of the regulations) that is valid that may not necessarily be common knowledge," Quist said.

MWH also helps people assure the compliance of operational facilities through environmental monitoring and pollution prevention planning.

"You have to have an understanding of what the operations are," Jokela said. "We work very closely with the crews working in the health and safety arena and with the project planners and with the operations managers ... so we can help determine what needs to be covered in the compliance documentation."

## Engineering and construction

The engineering and construction of facilities such as water supplies, water treatment plants and power plants form major components of MWH's services.

In Alaska the company does engineering design and is also a licensed general contractor. For example, the company designed and built the potable water plant for the Milne Point oil field on the North Slope. MWH has also been upgrading water supply and water treatment facilities for rural Alaska villages.

The company has carried out a number

Treatment functions and infrastructure," Jokela said. "Last year we designed a new intake gallery and pump house for the water system at the terminal."

Worldwide, MWH has designed and built a number of major hydroelectric power plants and, as Harza Engineering the company led the Susitna hydroelectric project in the early 1980s. More recently, the company has been involved in several hydropower projects in Alaska. For example, the company has been doing engineering and power re-evaluations for Chugach



For the FAA Chandalar Lake radio navigation beacon, MWH designed and installed an innovative multi-fuel power system that utilizes an array of solar panels, wind turbines, and diesel generators dramatically reducing fuel consumption.

Electric Association to support the relicensing of the Cooper Lake project, Jokela said.

## Control systems

MWH has developed a particular expertise in the design and construction of electronic control systems. These so-called SCADA systems enable the remote monitoring and control of facilities such as water supplies.

For example, the company has been designing a system for the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility. The system will enable a single control room to monitor the operation of plant and facilities throughout the Anchorage area.

"There'll be new SCADA and controls for three wastewater plants, two water plants and over 150 remote facilities, including water wells and pump stations," Jokela said.

In one of the more novel applications of SCADA technology, MWH designed and built a system for reducing the fuel requirements at the FAA's radio navigation beacon at Chandalar Lake in the southern foothills of the Brooks Range. Transporting diesel fuel to the beacon's electricity generator at a remote site many miles from the nearest road had become an expensive operation for the FAA.

The new system involves the use of solar panels and a wind generator to supplement the diesel generator.

"It's cut the fuel consumption dramatically by applying solar and wind power and by using SCADA technology to transfer information to Anchorage, where the FAA can monitor which of those units is actually operating, how much fuel is left and what the power production is," Jokela said.

## Reclamation and remediation

MWH can apply both its environmental expertise and its project skills when reclaiming or remediating land impacted by past activities.

For example, the company has participated in closure of disused reserve pits on Alaska's North Slope. The need to do this reclamation work during the winter complicated the testing of the cleanup — winter sampling indicated that the sites were clean but visual inspections in the summer showed the existence of oil sheens.

"Essentially we went back and helped design a baseline study on how to avoid that (problem) by using a field methodology for laboratory samples," Quist said.

This type of innovative approach to solving a sample testing issue evolved from an earlier project in which MWH remediated pollution from the old railroad roundhouse in Cordova. On that award-winning project natural organic material in the

ground exceeded the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's standards for cleaning up manmade hydrocarbons. MWH chemists had to come up with a sample cleanup method that ADEC would accept, Bonnie McLean, health and safety manager for MWH, said.

MWH has also been cleaning up the so-called orphan exploratory sites on the North Slope.

"We've primarily dealt with all of the ones that are outside the Prudhoe Bay area — south towards the Brooks Range," Jokela said.

On this particular project MWH had to develop a means of discharging water in open tundra without causing environmental damage. The company first had to work with the regulators to formulate an appropriate regulation.

"There hadn't been any regulation of that (type of) discharge in the past," Jokela said.

MWH then went on to design and build a portable water discharge system that would operate within the terms of the regulation.

With his company's ability to cover the gamut of environmental services, from consulting to engineering and construction, Jokela sees a very positive future for MWH. However, with the gradual completion of cleanup projects he anticipates an increasing proportion of the workload focusing on damage prevention rather than damage remediation.

"(The business) will certainly be changing and we'll be reacting to those changes," Jokela said. "But we're very optimistic about our future in the state and the future of the company as a whole." 1



MWH designed improvements to the Ballast Water Treatment facility as well as water supply and domestic wastewater at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

discharge permit with the agency folks they know what we're about and we know what they're about," Quist said. "It's clearly a benefit to the client, because ... we've already got a level of trust developed with the agency staff."

Extensive experience of interpreting the regulations also enables MWH to help

of projects at the Valdez Marine Terminal to improve the efficiency of the processes at the terminal.

"We just completed a retrofit of the domestic wastewater treatment plant at the ... Marine Terminal, and we are continuing to assist in evaluating the Ballast Water

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# Usibelli Coal Mine enters the 21st century

*With plenty of reserves and stable production costs coal competes effectively with other energy sources*

By ALAN BAILEY

Petroleum Directory Contributing Writer

Amid the ups and downs of the oil and gas business it's easy to forget the relative stability and reliability of the earliest form of industrial energy — coal. In Alaska, for example, Usibelli Coal Mine Inc. has unerringly turned out a flow of "black gold" from the Healy area for more than 60 years, providing energy for Alaska and generating a valuable export commodity for the state.

Emil Usibelli, an Italian immigrant, founded Usibelli Coal Mine in 1943, although mining operations in the Healy area actually started several decades earlier.

"(Usibelli Coal Mine) was started with a 10,000 ton, one-year contract to supply coal to Ladd Airfield during World War II," Steve Denton, Usibelli Coal Mine's vice president for business development, told Petroleum News.

Emil Usibelli created great skepticism among local miners by operating a surface mine rather than following the conventional strategy of underground mining.

"They thought this upstart didn't really know how to mine coal," Denton said.

However, Usibelli's revolutionary approach paid off and his business expanded steadily. Underground mining in the Healy area finally ceased in 1962 and in 1971 Usibelli Coal Mine bought out its last remaining competitor in the area.

The Usibelli family still owns the company and Joe Usibelli Jr., Emil Usibelli's grandson, is now company president.

## Energy for Alaska

Ever since its first contract with Ladd Airfield, Usibelli Coal Mine has supplied energy for heat and electricity in Alaska, especially in the Alaska Interior. The company supplies coal for cogeneration plants at Clear Air Force Station, Fort Wainwright, Eielson Air Force Base, the University of Alaska Fairbanks and for Aurora Energy in Fairbanks.

"We serve one mine-mouth powerplant ... and that's the Golden Valley plant here in Healy," Denton said.

Most of the plants are cogenerators, supplying both electricity and hot water or steam for heating neighborhood buildings. This arrangement maximizes the energy usage from the coal and provides environmental benefits in Alaska's frigid winters.

"In places like Fairbanks where you have air quality problems ... in the winter time, by centralizing your fuel burning in a central powerplant ... you've got much better control over the combustion and control over the pollutants ... you also dramatically reduce ice fog," Denton said.

## Cost stability

With question marks over the future of gas supplies in the Cook Inlet, Denton thinks that coal can help stabilize the future cost of electricity in the Alaska Railbelt. Whereas high and unpredictable exploration costs tend to heavily influence the cost of natural gas, coal exists in vast quantities and its production cost tends to be very stable, Denton said.

"The cost of finding coal is relatively low and most of your costs associated with producing coal are operating costs," Denton said.

Given this economic background, Usibelli Coal Mine has proposed the development of another mine-mouth powerplant called the Emma Creek Energy Project.

"We've produced a conceptual design of a power plant that would be located near our (new) Jumbo Dome deposit ...," Denton said. "That would be a new mine that would produce somewhere in the neighborhood of about 1.5 million tons (of coal) per year to feed a 200 megawatt powerplant."

Usibelli Coal Mine also owns leases covering the majority of the Wishbone Hill coal deposits near Sutton. These high-rank coal deposits could feed electricity generation in the Matanuska and Susitna valleys.

## A good coal to export

The low sulfur content of the coal from around Healy makes this environmentally friendly fuel especially appeal-



The Bucyrus-Erie 1300W walking dragline at work removing overburden in Two Bull Ridge Mine, Usibelli Coal Mine

ing for use in powerplants.

"The sulfur content of the coal that we ship is typically 0.2 percent or lower," Denton said. "So we have some of the lowest sulfur coal in the world."

Also in recent years there's been an upsurge in demand for the type of low-rank coal that the mine in Healy produces. The high quantity of volatiles in this type of coal renders the fuel easy to burn in powerplants, while low mining costs offset an energy content somewhat below that of higher-rank bituminous coals.



Joe Usibelli, left, chairman of the Usibelli Coal Mine Board and his son Joe Usibelli, Jr., company president.

With exports to South Korea starting in 1985 Usibelli Coal Mine began an international trade in low-rank coal.

"They were blending our coal with coals from other countries and burning in a furnace that was designed for that purpose," Denton said. "At that point in time we were the only low-rank coal exporter in the world."

When Indonesia entered the low-rank coal market in the early 1990s the market expanded. However, a glut of coal depressed prices and in 2002 Indonesia outbid Usibelli Coal Mine for the South Korea contract.

Since then, with China starting to import coal, world coal prices have rebounded. Usibelli Coal Mine is exporting to South Korea again and the company says that it can now compete on price with other Pacific Rim producers.

"The Pacific Rim coal price has more than doubled ... from what it was a year ago," Denton said. "That has created a very keen interest on the part of coal purchasers around the world to look for new sources of supply."

So Usibelli Coal Mine is actively pursuing export opportunities around the Pacific Rim and is even looking at export possibilities to South America.

## Responsible development

Although Usibelli Coal Mine has expanded its operations over the years the company has also achieved an exemplary reputation for its environmental programs. In fact the company pioneered a land reclamation program several years before the federal government started to regulate surface mine reclamation.

"The fundamental goals of that (environmental) program are protecting the water, so as not to pollute the surface and ground water, and to return the land to a condition comparable to its condition prior to mining," Denton said.

To protect the water in the area around the mine, all discharged water passes through certified settling ponds. Laboratory technicians regularly test water samples from the ponds and surrounding countryside, to ensure that no contamination is occurring.

The company reclaims land by continuously swapping overburden from actively mined strips back into previously mined strips.

"The first step is to salvage the topsoil from the new areas you're going to mine and spread it on the areas that you've already backfilled," Denton said. "... then we'll typically put grass on that and, if needed, we'll plant trees and plants that we've raised from seeds gathered in the Healy area ... we plant somewhere in the neighborhood of 20,000 to 30,000 trees and shrubs every year."

Local school children gather alder, spruce and willow cones for growing new trees, while college students help with planting trees and carrying out other reclamation activities.

The company's community involvement extends well beyond these remediation activities. Each year the company awards fellowship grants to the University of Alaska Fairbanks, gives scholarships to university students and, through the Usibelli Foundation, awards grants to worthy causes.

So what of the future?

With international trade in coal starting to boom Denton feels excited about his company's potential to expand into the burgeoning coal market. Usibelli Coal Mine's current production of 1.2 million to 1.3 million tons of coal per year sits well below the company's potential production rate.

"We feel that we've got the capacity for somewhere in the neighborhood of about 3 million tons per year, with minimal additions to existing equipment," Denton said.

And with Alaska's need for stable energy supplies coupled with

rising international energy usage, that extra capacity may prove invaluable. 1

*Editor's note: Alan Bailey owns Badger Productions in Anchorage, Alaska.*



Summer hire students, Logan Merrell and Derek Mollier plant spruce trees as part of the reclamation crew for Usibelli Coal Mine



# Cruz Construction Inc.: Windfall acquisition increases capabilities

*Cruz bumps up business by acquiring Western GECO LLC assets*

By **SUSAN BRAUND**

*Petroleum Directory Contributing Writer*

An emerging business trend is transparency — operating above board, with no hidden agendas, closed books or executive secrets. With Cruz Construction Inc. that's a way of life — what you see is what you get, and it's all good.

"I'm up front about things and I'm solutions oriented," says President Dave Cruz, who co-owns the business with his wife, Dana. "I'd rather resolve problems now, not wait around. I say, let's figure it out right here on the hood of the pickup!"

Cruz keeps the company small enough to remain hands-on and involved. For instance, he's there for the startup of each project.

"Getting started and off the ground is the hardest part and time is critical," he explains. "I make certain our projects get going and monitor them to keep them going smoothly. I plan to keep specialized and not lose the perspective of my customers. I devote resources to the job and don't spread things too thin or take on too much work. That way I always deliver the goods."

Before starting the business in 1981, he worked heavy construction, on the trans-Alaska pipeline in Valdez, then on the North Slope for Kodiak Oilfield Haulers for four years, where he learned about remote site work. Cruz Construction has grown to three offices in Palmer, Fairbanks and Deadhorse. The company specializes in winter ice roads, ice pads, land clearing and pioneer roads, exploratory support, off-highway transport, remote fuel transportation, and heavy civil construction.



**DAVE CRUZ**

JUDY PATRICK

## Pioneer roads and land clearing

Recognizing the importance of timely start up in a short construction season and minimal disturbance in environmentally sensitive areas, Cruz Construction uses innovative, customized equipment to get the job done. Dave designed and built the Enviro-Groomer, which can clear and grind vegetation without disturbing the root mat, avoiding problems with permafrost melt.

Cruz's experience with large-scale land and right-of-way clearing combined with its mobilization and logistic capabilities get the right people and right equipment wherever it's needed. Land clearing clients include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, state of Alaska, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Golden Valley Electric and Copper Valley Electric and, for over a decade, according to company materials, Cruz Construction has been designated a "first responder" for the Alaska Division of Forestry due to its proven ability to mobilize fire suppression equipment statewide on extremely short notice.

## Amazingly mobile

The company's brochure stresses its ability to mobilize quickly. "Few, if any, companies can match our ability to mobilize quickly to virtually any location in Alaska. We bring all necessary equipment for remote road construction including camps, temporary bridges, specialized timber harvesting equipment and all-terrain vehicles. And by keeping a self-contained man camp where the work is, valuable man hours are spent building your road, not traveling to and from the jobsite."

## Ready to go remote

"We're geared up for work in arctic conditions and in environmentally sensitive habitat. One big advantage is that my fleet, including low ground pressure vehicles, is sized for transport in a C-130 HERC," says Cruz.

"We're ready for you. For example if your site is 100 miles from a road, we will pioneer a winter trail to your lease, build an ice pad, transport the drill rig and supplies, support your operations with water, fuel for the duration and then demobe for you."



JUDY PATRICK



JUDY PATRICK

Above, this year's 47-mile Teck-Pogo mine winter road built by Cruz crews in less than 30 days did not go without accolades. Pictured is work on a bridge. At left, a Cruz Construction ice auger.

snow-making equipment on site to build snow up to the depth required for the access road. The project was completed both seasons on time and on budget."

Cruz Construction is also a reputable pipeline contractor, recently completing the Drift River crossing project for replacing more than 1,850 feet of 20-inch diameter pipe under Drift River on the west side of Cook Inlet, and a 2,600-foot six-inch steel pipe horizontal directional drilling project for Aurora Energy Services under critical wetland habitat at Shirleyville, Alaska. "We did pipe stringing, welding, hydro-testing, pipe pull-back and finally, tie-ins and necessary prep for oil to flow through the line," says Cruz. "And, again, we completed both projects ahead of schedule and on budget."

## Well-earned recognition

For its role in the Drift River crossing pipeline replacement, the Associated General Contractors of America awarded Cruz Construction the 2002 Excellence in Construction Award: Meeting the Challenge of a Job under \$3,000,000 Transportation, Marine, Heavy, Earthmoving. In 2003 the company won again, for the Golden Valley Electric Northern Intertie Project ice road and ice bridges.

For the 1999 Chena River dredging project in Fairbanks, Cruz earned the prestigious Commander's Medallion from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In 2004, the 47-mile Teck-Pogo winter road built by Cruz crews in less than 30 days did not go without accolades. A post-project letter to the company praised its work:

"Now that the winter road is but a memory we have had time to take a moment and reflect on just what an amazing feat was accomplished. In the course of less than a month, your crews successfully built 47 miles of meandering ice road in rugged terrain and maintained that road for two months in such superb condition that we had virtually no problems in bringing over 600 loads of freight, including a Cat 385 excavator and 88-foot bridge, to the Pogo mine site ... Your team must be complimented on their enthusiasm and dedication under often hostile conditions. Your ingenuity toward the unexpected problems that surfaced virtually daily is much appreciated ... and we are particularly pleased with the success of this project in the eyes of both the federal and state regulators." (From Peter Olson, PE Construction Manager, AMEC E& C Services Ltd.)

## Cruzin'

"We're gearing up for NPR-A. We want to offer more options, the latest equipment, competitive pricing and quality personalized service. We pay attention to detail, stay on top of agency restrictions, and attend to customer needs," says Cruz, "Like our saying goes, 'where the road ends, our work begins.'" 1

*Editor's note: Susan Braund owns Firestar Media Services in Anchorage, Alaska.*

## Boosting the business

Last spring when Western GECO discontinued work in Alaska, Cruz purchased its assets, including two shops and a pad in Deadhorse, and the fuel transfer and storage capabilities at Lonely. Tundra-approved ATV trailers and power units capable of hauling 30-ton loads, and some small track units, Tucker Sno-cats, top the list of acquired equipment.

Cruz also owns a hydrocarbon recovery and disposal system unit, on-site cleanup for small spills. The unit separates water and oil, processes the water until clean, and the oil is used to fuel the incinerator. The company's portable self-contained man-camp is equipped with a snow melter and incinerator.

## Current projects and recent work

Five current projects are on the docket. For the Corps of Engineers: Fort Wainwright Landfill Slope Stabilization and the upcoming Emergency Bank Stabilization at Galena, Alaska; Peak's Kenai-Kachemak Pipeline right-of-way clearing work; Copper Valley Telephone Cooperative's right-of-way clearing; and horizontal directional drilling for utilities in Valdez.

In 2001 and 2002 Golden Valley Electric's high profile Intertie project wound through the sensitive Tanana Flats area. Cruz's role was to construct a 78-mile ice road, once each season. "We utilized equipment such as Foremost Commanders low ground pressure vehicles to move all necessary equipment, supplies and personnel to support the construction effort. No materials other than snow and ice could be used on right-of-way, and ice bridge and the vegetative mat had to be maintained intact," says Cruz. "When the project was delayed by lack of snow, we innovated



# Keeping the frozen lands frozen

*Arctic Foundations specializes in frozen barriers and frozen soils technology*

By **SUSAN BRAUND**

*Petroleum Directory Contributing Writer*

The frozen North may have met its match in Erv Long, principal owner of Arctic Foundations, Inc. His 50-plus years of northern engineering and the instinctive wizardry that comes with understanding both the land and weather cycles, puts Long right up there in the category of Permafrost King, or at least the guy who is up to the challenge of developing frozen lands building technology.

"As man has widened his horizons and encroached on these frozen areas throughout the arctic and sub-arctic regions of the world," says Long, "one of the major engineering and construction obstacles has been the permafrost. Our frozen lands have become more and more of a design challenge to planners, engineers, and contractors alike."

## Permafrost

Understanding permafrost is not only important to civil engineering and architecture, it's also a crucial part of studying global change and protecting the environment in cold regions, according to the IRC Institute for Research in Construction. Permafrost is soil that remains frozen throughout the year. It occurs as large continuous areas of frozen soil, or in scattered patches surrounded by soil that experiences normal freeze-thaw cycles, or discontinuous permafrost. In all cases, an active layer of soil that experiences normal freezing and thawing during the seasons overlies permafrost.

"Permafrost soils must be kept frozen for the soil not to lose its bearing capacity," cautions Frostline Northern and Remote Technology in Housing. "When soil has relatively high water content in the active layer, measures must be taken to keep it frozen. When soil contains massive ice deposits, extra care must be taken in the design of the foundation if this is the case ... Buildings transmit heat to the underlying soil through convection and radiation. This can thaw frozen soil, leading to displacement of the foundation."

## The company

Arctic Foundations Inc. has more than 50 years experience as an innovator in foundation construction and technology for frozen soils and frozen barriers. Long started the business in the early 1970s while still working at the Corps of Engineers. He recognized the advantage of freezing pre-



At the Aurora communications tower, Thermosyphon units installed by the Corps of Engineers in 1960 are still functioning and maintaining their permafrost stability today. Erv Long, owner of Arctic Foundations developed the Thermopile system and patented his thermal transfer process in the late 1950s.

manufactured and installed thousands of ground freezing and thawing systems and units throughout North America, Canada, Greenland, and Russia.

"We've become a leader in state-of-the-art permafrost foundations, ground stabilization pressure vessels, Thermopiles and Thermoprobes and frozen barriers and we continue to develop and advance Thermosyphon technology as techniques improve in related sectors of the geotechnical industry."

## The technology

Arctic Foundation's primary product is the Thermosyphon, or pressure vessels with aluminum and fusion coat epoxy finish, also called Thermoprobes. The Thermosyphon is strictly a heat-transfer device, basically a closed evaporation condensation system, extracting excess heat out of the earth, when used to maintain frozen conditions.

"Let's go from the top down," explains Long. "Air colder than the ground causes condensation on the inside of the top of Thermosyphon that reduces pressure in it. That reduction then permits boiling of the liquid below ground which causes reduction in temperature and permits heat to transfer from soil to the Thermosyphon."

The technology was used in the vertical support members on the trans-Alaska pipeline and to stabilize the foundation of the terminals on each end of the Colville River crossing for the Alpine project, along with hundreds

of other projects.

- Active-passive hybrid systems are used in climates where low winter temperatures do not prevail or where freezing is required prior to the onset of cold weather.

## Foundations

According to Long, thermo design of a foundation to maintain permafrost must extract heat from building of seasonal thaw from above, geothermal heat from below, warmer soils surrounding the site, buried water and sewer lines, runoff from building roofs, and surface drainage. Design must also allow for seasonal thaw without affecting the total foundation area.

"For foundations, our clients are the engineers. We build to their specs," says Long.

## Containment and frozen barriers

Confinement of a buried hazardous waste can be accomplished by directly freezing a contaminated soil mass or by surrounding it with a frozen barrier.

"AFI's Hybrid Thermosyphon Technology is a well-established technology that is ideally suited to the long-term containment and immobilization of many subsurface hazardous wastes that the US Department of Energy has targeted as part of their environmental management program," Arctic Foundations told Petroleum News. "These contaminants include tritium, strontium 90, DNAPLs, and many others. Few technologies can match ours."

The most recent and pertinent application of contaminant control was a demonstration project at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in which the HRE Reactor Pond was surrounded with a frozen barrier measuring 300 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. Installed during the summer of 1997, the system continues to operate, functioning as planned. It is effectively stopping the flow of radionuclide contaminants from the pond and is doing so in a very cost effective, trouble-free manner.

## Mining and dams

Ground freezing can be a beneficial technology for dam building without regard to any specific industry, or the purpose the dam serves. A frozen dam can be even more effective than a traditional type because freezing can more effectively seal multiple soils types in the dam and, if necessary, well below it, as evidenced at the Panda Dam and Ekati Diamond Mine in Canada's Northwest Territory, and a tailings dam in the Russian Far East. Long is currently discussing business with Arctic Foundations of Canada and Canadian mining groups. The technology he uses for mining and dams is the same as that employed for permafrost foundations or frozen barriers.

Arctic Foundations serves clients in multiple industries, including oil and gas, mining, state and federal governments and individual business — anyone who needs to maintain frozen ground over long periods of time or who requires a frozen barrier or foundation. 1

*Editor's note: Susan Braund owns Firestar Media Services in Anchorage, Alaska.*



A load of ThermoHelix Piles headed to Kotzebue. Arctic Foundations is a leader in permafrost foundations, ground stabilization pressure vessels, Thermopiles, Thermoprobes and frozen barriers.

viously thawed unstable ground and the need to maintain permafrost; in the late 1950s he developed the Thermopile system and went on to patent his thermal transfer process.

Initially he did his design work at night and hired others to operate the business, and then in 1976 he retired from the Corps and took over active management. Because manufacturing costs were high in Alaska during pipeline construction years, Arctic Foundations contracted its manufacturing in Seattle from 1972-78. In the early 1980s the company bought its Anchorage facility and eventually added adjacent property. The complex is now comprised of 12,500 square feet of building space and 53,000 square feet of yard space, including a metal spray and fusion plastic coatings shop and a pressure vessel shop, one of few in Alaska. Arctic Foundations employs a core six people and seasonally expands up to 17, depending on contracts. "Welding is the key to our quality. We have several excellent permanent, full time welders," says Long.

"The Corps installed the first commercial units in 1960 at the Aurora and Glennallen communication sites," says Long, "and they are still functioning and maintaining their permafrost stability today. Since that time we've designed,

of other projects.

Thermosyphon barrier freezing technology compares favorably to many of the non-freezing technologies to depths of 50 feet — and is unbeatable at greater depths for project durations of five years or longer, according to the company, including microbial barriers, sheet piling, slurry walls, grout injection, pump-treat-inject, in situ vitrification and membrane barriers.

- Temperature of the barrier can be controlled to ensure the necessary liquid-solid phase change.
- Frozen barriers can be developed in soils that are saturated or relatively dry.
- Can be applied at any depth from the ground surface, or its application can be restricted and applied only to a predetermined zone below the surface.
- Can be used to form a vertical, horizontal, or angled impervious barrier, or as an encapsulating soil mass.
- Excavation is minimized as Thermoprobes are installed by drilling or driving.
- A system can be installed quickly if necessary.
- Regulatory Issues are typically non-controversial due to minimal environmental impact.



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Phone: Anchorage: (907) 248-3335  
Email: dscarbrough@airlogak.com  
Helicopter contract and charter services.

#### Era Aviation

6160 Carl Brady Dr.  
Anchorage, AK 99502  
Contact: John Holland  
Phone: (907) 248-4422  
Fax: (907) 266-8383  
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#### Evergreen Helicopters of Alaska

1936 Merrill Field Drive  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Contact: Joy Journeay, marketing mgr.  
Phone: (907) 257-1519  
Fax: (907) 279-6816  
Email: joy@evergreenak.com  
Contact: Greg Thies, director of marketing  
Phone: (907) 257-1504  
Email: g.thies@evergreenak.com  
Nome office: (907) 443-5334  
Airlines office: (907) 257-1500  
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Fax: (907) 561-8364  
Email: tom.labno@airliquide.com  
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 Fax: (907) 561-8364  
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 Website: www.uniquemachineinc.com  
 Connections; API 5CT, API 7B, Grant Prideco H-Series, Hydril, Hunting, Atlas Bradford, NS Technology Co, Inc., Vallourec and Vam PTS proprietary connections.

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 Fax: 563-1003  
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 Email: mhylen@kakivik.com  
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 Contact: Mark Hylen, president/CEO  
 Email: mhylen@kakivik.com  
 Web site: www.kakivik.com  
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 Email: efjelstad@perkinscoie.com  
 Contact: Teresa Berwick, attorney  
 Email: tberwick@perkinscoie.com  
 Phone: (907) 279-8561  
 Fax: (907) 276-3108  
 Other Offices:  
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 Email: joy@evergreenak.com  
 Contact: Greg Thies, director of marketing  
 Phone: (907) 257-1504  
 Email: g.thies@evergreenak.com  
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Anchorage, AK 99518  
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Fax: (907) 451-6543  
Email: info@usibelli.com  
Web site: www.usibelli.com  
Other Office  
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Healy, AK 99743  
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Toll Free: (800) 478-5451  
Website: www.lounsburyinc.com  
*Specializing in surveying for Alaska oil and gas exploration, oilfield development and transportation systems, conventional and GPS surveying, and mapping.*

**Tank Fabrication**

**Northern Transportation**

310 K St., Ste. 200  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
42003 McKenzie Hwy.  
Hay River, NWT X0E0R9  
Contact: John Marshall  
Phone: (867) 874-5167  
Fax: (867) 874-5179  
Email: jmarshall@ntcl.com  
Web site: www.ntcl.com  
*Marine transportation along the McKenzie River to the Beaufort Sea and Alaska's North Slope.*

**Telephone Equipment & Sales**

**ASTAC**

4300 B St., Ste. 501  
Anchorage, AK 99503  
Contact: Erin Ealum  
Phone: (907) 563-3989  
Phone: 1-800-478-6409  
Fax: (907) 563-1932  
Email: info@astac.net  
*Providing local and long distance service, Internet, maintenance and training, consultation, installation, engineering, Centrex, custom calling features, digital cross connect service, and digital data service to the North Slope region of Alaska.*

**North Slope Telecom**

2020 E. Dowling, Ste. 3  
Anchorage, AK 99507  
Contact: Bill Laxson, president  
Phone: (907) 562-4693  
Fax: (907) 562-0818  
Email: info@nstiak.com



Web site: [www.nstiak.com](http://www.nstiak.com)  
 Design, installation and maintenance of telephone, cable plant, fiber optics, data network, VOIP, paging and cellular systems. Twenty years of arctic experience.

### Temporary Placement Services

#### Chiulista Camp Services/Mayflower Catering

6613 Brayton Dr., Ste. C  
 Anchorage, AK 99507  
 Contact: George B. Gardner, pres/gm  
 Phone: (907) 278-2208  
 Fax: (907) 677-7261  
 Email: [ggardner@calistacorp.com](mailto:ggardner@calistacorp.com)  
 The 100 percent Alaska Native owned and operated catering company on the North Slope, catering and housekeeping to your tastes, not ours.

### Training

#### Pacific Rim Institute of Safety & Management (PRISM)

P.O. Box 3670  
 Kenai, AK 99611  
 Contact: David C. Burnett, program mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 283-3054  
 Fax: (907) 283-1853  
 Email: [PRISM@Alaska.net](mailto:PRISM@Alaska.net)  
 Web site: [www.AAICorp.com](http://www.AAICorp.com)  
 Providing a full spectrum of compliance based training for workers in the field of health, safety and emergency response, all in one location. Basic rigging, forklift and manlift operations, confined space rescue, hazardous materials, maritime (BST, STCW certified), industrial fire fighting (NFPA 600).

#### Well Safe Inc.

209 E. 51st Ave.  
 Anchorage, AK 99503  
 Contact: Ken Carroll, district mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 743-9871  
 Fax: (907) 743-9872  
 Email: [kcarroll@wellsafe.com](mailto:kcarroll@wellsafe.com)  
 Web site: [www.wellsafe.com](http://www.wellsafe.com)  
 A full service safety company specializing in remote medical support, expeditors, confined space rescue teams, H2S and safety consultants, OSHA training and rentals/sales of gas detection and breathing air systems.

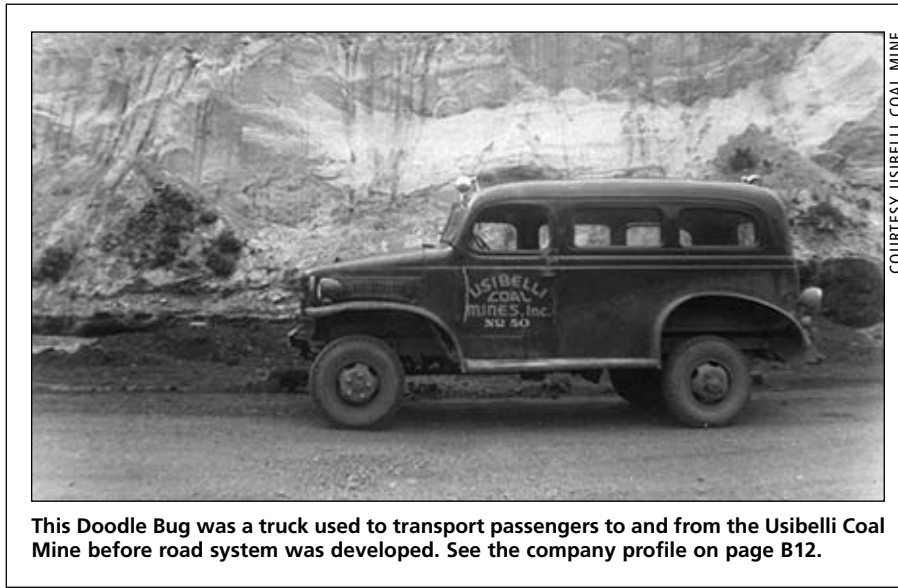
### Underwater NDT & Photography

#### American Marine Corp.

6000 A St.  
 Anchorage, AK 99518  
 Contact: Tom Ulrich, reg. mgr. svc. group  
 Phone: (907) 562-5420  
 Fax: (907) 562-5426  
 Email: [alaska@amsghq.com](mailto:alaska@amsghq.com)  
 Web site: [www.amsghq.com](http://www.amsghq.com)  
 American Marine Corp. provides full service marine construction and diving services throughout Alaska and the Pacific Basin.

#### Offshore Divers

5400 Eielson St.  
 Anchorage, AK 99518  
 Contact: Don Ingraham, owner/mgr.  
 Contact: Leif Simcox, owner/oper. mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 563-9060  
 Fax: (907) 563-9061  
 Email: [don@offshoredivers.com](mailto:don@offshoredivers.com)  
 Web site: <http://www.offshoredivers.com>  
 Offshore Divers is an Alaska owned div-



This Doodle Bug was a truck used to transport passengers to and from the Usibelli Coal Mine before road system was developed. See the company profile on page B12.

ing contractor specializing in sub-sea oil-field work on mooring systems, pipelines, platforms and docks in Cook Inlet, on the North Slope and in Valdez.

#### Storm Chasers Marine Services

P.O. Box 757  
 Seward, AK 99664  
 Contact: Mica Van Buskirk  
 Phone: (907) 224-3536  
 Fax: (907) 224-6080  
 Email: [sci@seward.net](mailto:sci@seward.net)  
 Providing quality marine services in Alaska for over 15 years. Commercial diving, underwater welding, underwater inspection with video, vessel repair, marine construction and marine salvage services.

### Underwater Welding

#### American Marine Corp.

6000 A St.  
 Anchorage, AK 99518  
 Contact: Tom Ulrich, reg. mgr. svc. group  
 Phone: (907) 562-5420  
 Fax: (907) 562-5426  
 Email: [alaska@amsghq.com](mailto:alaska@amsghq.com)  
 Web site: [www.amsghq.com](http://www.amsghq.com)  
 American Marine Corp. provides full service marine construction and diving services throughout Alaska and the Pacific Basin.

#### Offshore Divers

5400 Eielson St.  
 Anchorage, AK 99518  
 Contact: Don Ingraham, owner/mgr.  
 Contact: Leif Simcox, owner/oper. mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 563-9060  
 Fax: (907) 563-9061  
 Email: [don@offshoredivers.com](mailto:don@offshoredivers.com)  
 Web site: <http://www.offshoredivers.com>  
 Offshore Divers is an Alaska owned diving contractor specializing in sub-sea oil-field work on mooring systems, pipelines, platforms and docks in Cook Inlet, on the North Slope and in Valdez.

#### Storm Chasers Marine Services

P.O. Box 757  
 Seward, AK 99664  
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 Phone: (907) 224-3536  
 Fax: (907) 224-6080  
 Email: [sci@seward.net](mailto:sci@seward.net)  
 Providing quality marine services in Alaska for over 15 years. Commercial diving, underwater welding, underwater

inspection with video, vessel repair, marine construction and marine salvage services.

### Vehicle Repair

#### Kenworth Alaska

2838 Porcupine Dr.  
 Anchorage, AK 99501  
 Contact: Jim Scherieble, branch mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 279-0602  
 Phone: (800) 478-0602  
 Fax: (907) 258-6639  
 Email: [parts@kenworthalaska.com](mailto:parts@kenworthalaska.com)  
 Email: [sales@kenworthalaska.com](mailto:sales@kenworthalaska.com)  
 Website: [www.kenworthalaska.com](http://www.kenworthalaska.com)  
 Fairbanks office:  
 3730 Braddock St.  
 Fairbanks, AK 99701  
 Contact: Ed Lewis, branch mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 455-9900  
 Fax: (907) 479-8295  
 Kenworth Alaska is a full service truck dealership in two locations – Anchorage and Fairbanks. New and used truck sales, parts and service.

#### Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury

1625 Old Steese Hwy.  
 Fairbanks, AK 99701  
 Contact: Steven Angel, fleet sales mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 459-4044  
 Fax: (907) 450-4007  
 Email: [fleetsales@seekins.com](mailto:fleetsales@seekins.com)  
 Web site: [www.seekins.com](http://www.seekins.com)  
 Ford Lincoln Mercury dealer located in Fairbanks Alaska providing solutions to your transportation needs. Parts and service support in Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay.

### Vehicle Sales/Rental

#### Seekins Ford Lincoln Mercury

1625 Old Steese Hwy.  
 Fairbanks, AK 99701  
 Contact: Steven Angel, fleet sales mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 459-4044  
 Fax: (907) 450-4007  
 Email: [fleetsales@seekins.com](mailto:fleetsales@seekins.com)  
 Web site: [www.seekins.com](http://www.seekins.com)  
 Ford Lincoln Mercury dealer located in Fairbanks Alaska providing solutions to your transportation needs. Parts and service support in Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay.

### Welding

#### Udelhoven Oilfield System Services

Anchorage office:  
 184 E. 53rd Ave.  
 Anchorage, AK 99518  
 Phone: (907) 344-1577  
 Fax: (907) 522-2541  
 Nikiski office:  
 P.O. Box 8349  
 Nikiski, AK 99635  
 Phone: (907) 776-5185  
 Fax: (907) 776-8105  
 Prudhoe office:  
 Pouch 340103  
 Prudhoe Bay, AK 99734  
 Phone: (907) 659-8093  
 Fax: (907) 659-8489  
 Serving Alaska for more than 25 years.

### Weld Repairs/Manufacturing

#### Hanover Canada

500, 101-6 Ave. SW  
 Calgary, AB, T2P 3P4 Canada  
 Contact: Rod Saville, Country Mgr.  
 Canada  
 Phone: (403) 261-6801  
 Fax: (403) 266-1066

Email: [info@hanover-co.com](mailto:info@hanover-co.com)  
 Web site: [www.hanover-canada.com](http://www.hanover-canada.com)  
 Hanover Canada is the leading provider of natural gas compression services and equipment in Canada. We maintain an 85,000 horsepower rental compression fleet in Canada and over 3.6 million horsepower rental fleet worldwide. Hanover custom designs production equipment in accordance with customer's specifications using strict internal engineering standards. We have the capability to provide process, mechanical and instrument design engineering for any production equipment project worldwide.

#### Natco Canada

P.O. Box 850, Stn. T  
 Calgary, Alberta T2H2H3  
 Contact: Kevin Baird, bus. dev. mgr.  
 Phone: (403) 203-2103  
 Fax: (403) 236-0488  
 Email: [kbaird@natco-ca.com](mailto:kbaird@natco-ca.com)  
 Web site: [www.natco-ca.com](http://www.natco-ca.com)  
 Natco Group engineers, designs and manufactures process, wellhead and water treatment equipment and systems used in the production of oil and gas worldwide.

#### Peak Oilfield Service

2525 C St., Ste. 201  
 Anchorage, AK 99503  
 Contact: Bill Stamps, business development/ex. affairs  
 Phone: (907) 263-7000  
 Fax: (907) 263-7070  
 Email: [billstamps@peakalaska.com](mailto:billstamps@peakalaska.com)  
 Web site: [www.peakalaska.com](http://www.peakalaska.com)  
 Alaska based general contractors.

#### STEELFAB

2132 Railroad Ave.  
 Anchorage, AK 99501  
 Contact: Janet Faulkner, vice president  
 Phone: (907) 264-2819  
 Fax: (907) 276-3448  
 Email: [jfaulkner@steelfabak.com](mailto:jfaulkner@steelfabak.com)  
 STEELFAB is the largest Alaskan-owned steel service center in the state. It provides pressure vessels, modules, special design items and raw steel products.

#### Unique Machine

5839 Old Seward Hwy  
 Anchorage, AK 99518  
 Contact: Pat Hanley, COO  
 Phone: (907) 563-3012  
 Fax: (907) 562-1376  
 Email: [office@uniquemachineinc.com](mailto:office@uniquemachineinc.com)  
 Web site: [www.uniquemachineinc.com](http://www.uniquemachineinc.com)  
 The design, development, manufacture and distribution of oilfield construction, mining, fishing and government parts to industry quality standards.

# OIL COMPANIES

### Operators

#### ConocoPhillips Alaska

700 G St.  
 P.O. Box 100360  
 Anchorage, AK 99510-0360  
 Contact: Kevin O. Meyers, president & CEO  
 Phone: (907) 265-6134  
 Fax: (907) 265-1502

#### Marathon Oil

3201 C St., Ste 800  
 Anchorage, AK 99503  
 Contact: John A. Barnes, regional mgr.  
 Phone: (907) 561-5311  
 Fax: (907) 564-6489  
 Website: [www.marathon.com](http://www.marathon.com)

#### XTO Energy

810 Houston St., Ste. 2000  
 Fort Worth, TX 76102  
 Contact: Vaughn O. Vennerberg, II  
 Phone: (817) 870-2800  
 Fax: (817) 870-0379  
 Other Office: XTO Energy, 52260 Shell Road, Kenai, AK 99611, Doug Marshall, production superintendent  
 XTO Energy, established in 1986, is engaged in the acquisition and development of quality, long-lived producing oil and gas properties and exploration for oil and gas.



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The Nature Conservancy in Alaska and its Board of Trustees salute our membership for the legacy they are leaving for future generations. Join us.

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David Wight, President & CEO  
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Alaska Wildland Adventures  
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421 West First Avenue, Suite 200  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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**FAX: 907-276-2584**  
**ONLINE: nature.org/alaska**  
**EMAIL: alaska@tnc.org**

photo by Lara Hiltz



# company snapshots

CHRIS AREND



Tim O'Neill, systems manager for Usibelli Coal Mine, oversees the maintenance and operation of the company's dragline

COURTESY OF MWH



MWH designed and oversaw the installation of nearly 30,000 feet of water and sewer mains for the community of Tanana.



JUDY PATRICK

A Cruz Construction water truck works on the construction of an ice road. The company specializes in winter ice roads, ice pads, land clearing and pioneer roads, exploratory support, off-highway transport, remote fuel transportation, and heavy civil construction.



COURTESY OF ARCTIC FOUNDATIONS

Above, Arctic Foundation's hybrid Thermosyphon Technology is a well-established technology ideally suited to containment and dams. A frozen dam can be even more effective than a traditional type because freezing can more effectively seal multiple soils types in and below the dam as evidenced at the Panda Dam in Northwest Territory Canada. At right, Usibelli Coal Mine: a view from Two Bull Ridge looking at the land reclamation on Poker Flats Mine



CHRIS AREND



JUDY PATRICK

Cruz Construction won awards for the Golden Valley Electric Northern Intertie Project ice road.