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CFROG Says Oil Project Needs Well Abandonment Plan

Creek Road, Ojai – Oil and gas industry watchdog organization Citizens For Responsible Oil and Gas (CFROG) says the organization will support the Bentley Well application if the permit contains conditions requiring a well abandonment plan.

"The most important part of any new permit for these old and declining oil wells on the edge of the City of Ojai is how to make sure the area is cleaned up and the wells are properly abandoned," said John Brooks, President of CFROG. "If the proper conditions are imposed, the public can be assured the environment will be restored when the Bentley wells are spent."

The idea of abandonment plans is being raised because of the increasing costs associated with plugging and abandoning wells when an operator goes bankrupt and walks away from their wells. Such a case is currently unfolding in Simi Valley (Barnett Wells). Several old wells have been labeled deserted by the California State Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) and DOGGR issued a plug and abandonment order in July, 2015. But the owner of the wells filed for bankruptcy and now the wells are abandoned, and leaking methane. Homeowners nearby are struggling to get any local agency to assist in compelling DOGGR to take action.

CFROG also says an approved permit should compel the County to monitor the abandonment plan and notify the Ojai City Council and Ojai Municipal Advisory Council (MAC) on abandonment progress. Well stimulation process, such as hydraulic fracturing and re-drilling of any wells should also be prohibited in the final permit. The Ojai MAC meets Monday, May 16. The Ojai City Council meeting Tuesday, May 17.

The Bentley Family trust is applying for a 20-year time extension on their existing Conditional Use Permit (C.U.P) governing the operation of nine oil and gas wells and an oil storage tank farm located at 1033 E. Ojai Avenue. The location is accessed from Creek Road and is behind Soule Park.

On May 11 CFROG submitted comments to the Ojai City Council and the Ojai MAC in advance of their meetings next week. Ventura County Planning staff are scheduled to present the project to each council and receive comments as part of the permit process because the project lies within the Ojai Valley Area Plan.

CFROG also points out California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) issue regarding the baseline air emissions. Here is an excerpt from the comments submitted by CFROG -

"The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) baseline for this project was November 2015. At that time, only three of the nine wells were actively producing. Therefore, under CEQA, six of the wells under this permit would be new sources of emissions. The Ventura County APCD has determined that each oil well AFTER Best Available Control Technology (BACT) emissions controls are installed emits 2 lbs. of ROC per day. Thus, six new oil wells will emit 12 lbs. of ROC total per day. This amount of ozone precursor emissions triggers the "significant adverse impact" threshold at over 5lbs as stated in the Ojai Valley Area Plan.

Thus, the CEQA review for this project must include a focused EIR on Air Quality unless the permit is limited to two active oil wells at any time."