The Massive Oil Basin: a Profile of the Bakken Shale Oil Formation by Judy

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The Bakken Basin is just one of the many areas in the US identified as potential oil fields in the 1970s. It lies within the Williston Basin that spans Northern Montana, North Dakota, and up towards Southern Saskatchewan in Canada.

For more than 20 years, the government and some oil companies knew there was oil in the Bakken Basin, although at that time, the technology required to drill and harvest the oil reserves under the Bakken was not yet developed. Bakken has a wide layer of rock which traditional oil drilling techniques cannot penetrate. When it failed to produce oil for prospectors, it was abandoned in the â€˜90s in search for better oil prospectsâ€¦until Dick Findley, a petroleum geologist based a few miles outside Sidney, Montana, made a groundbreaking discovery.

Mapping the Oil Basin

The Bakken Shale Oil Formation that was discovered by Findley is considered by the UnitedStates Geological Survey (USGS) as the largest continuous oil reserve ever assessed by the agency. By "continuous", it means the reserve is spread out geographically like an underground pool across states, as opposed to large or small pockets of localized oil reserves.

At present, there are several companies drilling at the Bakken Shale Oil Formation. Below is just a partial list, along with their location and acreage, as well as other details such as number of operated oil drilling rigs and average production in BOEPD (barrels of oil equivalent per day).

Brigham Exploration (BEXP) â€“ 371,200 net acres in and around McKenzie County,North Dakota and 217,900 net acres in and around Richland County, Montana.

Continental Resources (CLR) â€“ 901,098 net acres encompassing North Dakota, wherethey have 21 drilling rigs, and Montana, where they have two drilling rigs; they raised 34,505BOEPD on the average in the third quarter of 2011.

Hess (HES) â€“ 900,000 acres in North Dakota, with 18 oil rigs operating as of 2011; average production in the third quarter of 2011 was 32,000 BOEPD.

EOG Resources Inc. (EOG) â€“ 600,000 net acres, mostly in and around Mountrail andDunn Counties in North Dakota; maximum peak rate is 1,189 BOEPD as of latest data.

Northern Oil and Gas (NOG) â€“ 147,407 net acres with an average BOEPD of 6,500, plus 56,858 net mineral acres for leasehold in Billings, Burke, Divide, Dunn, Golden Valley, McKenzie, Mountrail, Stark and Williams counties in North Dakota, and in Richland and Roosevelt counties in Montana.

Marathon Oil Corp. (MRO) â€“ 27 gross operated wells mainly in North Dakota, which produce an average of 20,000 net BOEPD as of 2011.

Whiting Petroleum Corporation (WLL) â€“ owns six oil prospects in the Bakken Basin:the Lewis & Clark/Pronghorn Prospect, which has 38 wells that produce an average of 3,960 BOEPD as of the third quarter, 2011; the Hidden Bench Prospect in McKenzie County, North Dakota, with 29,334 net acres that produce 855 BOEPD average as of the third quarter of 2011; the Tarpon Prospect, still in McKenzie County, North Dakota, where they own 6,265 net acres that produce 4,815 BOEPD as of October, 2011; the Cassandra Prospect with its 14,483 net acres that produce an average of 878

BOEPD since it started in 2011; the Missouri Breaks Prospect in Richland County, Montana, where it has 40,250 net acres waiting to be spud with oil wells; and the Sanish Field in the Three Forks, which is still being developed.

These are just some of the biggest companies currently operating the Bakken area. For more information, you can refer to the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources â€“ Oil and Gas Division and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation â€“ Board of Oil and Gas Conservation.

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Judy - About Author:
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