

# MONTEREY COUNTY WEEKLY

## After an appeal is dropped, a major San Benito County oil project dies with it.

May 11, 2015 - by David Schmalz

A major proposed oil project in San Benito County is officially kaput.

Last Wednesday, Citadel Exploration, Inc. drops its appeal of a Monterey County Superior Court ruling last July ordering the company to complete an environmental impact report before proceeding with 15 steam injection test wells on a ranch near Pinnacles National Park.

The lawsuit was brought by the non-profit Center for Biological Diversity in 2013, after the project was approved by the county, and CDB spokesman Patrick Sullivan says it could have had a profound impact on the environment and local water resources.

“Cyclic steam injection wells] take an immense amount of steam and shoot it underground to loosen up oil deposits,” he says. “The problem with it is it creates havoc in the well, and underground, it’s a huge challenge to oil well’s integrity.”

Sullivan adds that a sinkhole created by the steam injection well led to the death of a Kern County oil worker in 2011.



Robert Parry

Aside from creating sinkholes, CBD's Patrick Sullivan says they can create fissures that allow petroleum to seep into groundwater.

Steam injection is among the types of oil extraction San Benito County voters banned last November when they overwhelmingly approved Measure J, which also bans fracking in the county.

However, Sullivan says Citadel could have been allowed to use the technique if they won their appeal because the project was approved before the measure became law. Now, Citadel will have to go through another approval process to proceed.

“We are very gratified to have prevailed here, it’s been a real concern to us for a long time,” he says. “[The project] was a real environmental threat and threat to public safety.”