October 18, 2021

Via electronic mail

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
1055 Monterey St. D430
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
Boardofsup@co.slo.ca.us

Re: Arroyo Grande Oil Field Extension Request Appeal to Board of Supervisors, File No. DRC 2015-0002/CUP D010386D (Agenda Item No. 30)

Dear San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of the organizations listed below, we urge you to reject Sentinel Peak Resources’ request to modify its permit to extend the time for it to drill dozens of additional wells in the Arroyo Grande Oil Field. The permit Sentinel wants to resurrect expired in 2015 and is now more than a decade and a half old. In the time that has passed since it was issued, the evidence that oil and gas drilling poses unacceptable health, safety, and climate threats has only grown. Despite the dangers, County staff continued to authorize new wells after the permit expired, and the Board of Supervisors is now considering a request to drill more. The Board of Supervisors must put an end to perpetual drilling at the October 19 hearing. If Sentinel wishes to drill more wells, it should apply for a new permit that complies with state environmental law.

The County Must End Backdoor Approvals and Commit to Transparency

We recently learned that County staff has signed off on new drilling at the Arroyo Grande oil field without any public process. As groups and residents concerned about drilling in the County, we urge the County to stop these undisclosed approvals and increase transparency for all drilling activities.

In 2015, when the Center for Biological Diversity appealed the Planning Commission’s decision to extend Sentinel’s expired permit, that appeal should have stopped all new drilling until the Board issued a ruling at a public hearing. Yet County staff has continued to issue approvals to Sentinel for more wells. The appeal will decide whether Sentinel can drill 31 of the 130 wells approved back in 2005, but in the meantime, County staff have quietly allowed at least 37 additional new wells to move forward. The County claims these are “replacement” wells, but these wells are not “replacing” similar existing wells, they are intensifying injection and production. The County has allowed Sentinel to dramatically increase the number of high-risk injection wells in the field—from 30 wells listed in the 2005 permit, to 53 authorized as of early 2021. The extension request now asks for 8 more injection wells.

All drilling affects the health and environment of those who live near the oil field. And people who live with the pollution and noxious odors of Sentinel’s drilling should not have to hear about the oil field’s expansion through a public records request or newspaper article. Moving forward, the communities impacted by oil drilling must be informed and given the opportunity to participate in the decisions that will impact their air, water, and quality of life. The County should provide a public notice and comment process for all drilling at Arroyo Grande.
Communities Near the Arroyo Grande Oil Field Have Lived with the Unacceptable Impacts of Drilling for Too Long

Oil and gas drilling is fundamentally incompatible with a safe and healthy future.

A growing body of national and California-focused scientific research shows the harmful health impacts of living in close proximity to oil and gas drilling operations, including worsened asthma, cardiovascular disease, low birth weight, and reproductive health impacts. Recent studies from Harvard and the American Lung Association point to the connections between fossil fuel-related air pollution and premature death.

The extra injection wells the County has let Sentinel drill are especially damaging. Injection requires massive amounts of water, straining that resource while our state is in the grip of a historic drought. It also contributes to the million-plus gallons of wastewater that Sentinel generates every day and injects into groundwater and Pismo Creek. A hydrogeologist explained to County planners five years ago that the Arroyo Grande oil field operator could not demonstrate that nearby water wells would be safe from pollution if fissures open up due to an earthquake or injection. With at least 100 water-supply wells within a mile of the oilfield, migration of contamination would be devastating. Oil spills also regularly happen at oil fields around the state where injection occurs. In fact, Ventura County imposed an emergency moratorium on drilling with steam injection in 2019 because of concerns about safety and water contamination. San Luis Obispo County should adopt a similar measure.

Continued drilling at the Arroyo Grande Oil Field is also incompatible with the urgent need for local, state, and national action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This summer the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report forecasting that the devastating impacts of climate change will continue to intensify over the next 30 years. The report warns that there is a short window of time to curb fossil fuel emissions to prevent an even worse fate for current and future generations. When the report was released, the UN Secretary General emphasized that it must “sound a death knell” for fossil fuels; we must end oil production to maintain a livable planet.

We strongly urge the County to reject Sentinel’s extension request and work instead to protect communities and the environment from oil and gas pollution.

Respectfully Submitted,

1. Biodiversity First!
2. Cal Poly Initiative for Climate Leadership and Resilience
3. Center for Biological Diversity
4. Ecologistics, Inc.
5. EcoPlanners
6. ECOSLO - Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo
7. Let’s Green CA!
8. Morro Bay Open Space Alliance
9. Morro Coast Audubon Society
10. Mothers for Peace Action Committee
11. North County Watch
12. San Luis Obispo Climate Coalition
13. San Luis Obispo Foam Free, SLO Down Plastics
14. Sierra Club, Santa Lucia Chapter
15. Sunrise Movement San Luis Obispo
16. Women's March San Luis Obispo

CC:
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County of San Luis Obispo Department of Planning & Building
Attn: Trevor Keith, Director
(tkeith@co.slo.ca.us)