

Oregon coast possible site for oil drilling

By CHRIS NORMAN
Of the Emerald

The likelihood of offshore oil drilling on the Oregon Coast might become reality if oil is discovered off Northern California's shores an Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission biologist says.

"If oil companies hit oil in California, it'll be tough to stop them in Oregon," says biologist Jerry MacLeod, responding to the federal Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) decision last November to open the Northern California coast to offshore oil drilling.

Offshore rigs could creep up from California

The BLM asked oil companies to nominate by June sites between Point Conception and the Oregon border, that they would like to lease. The area is now free of wells.

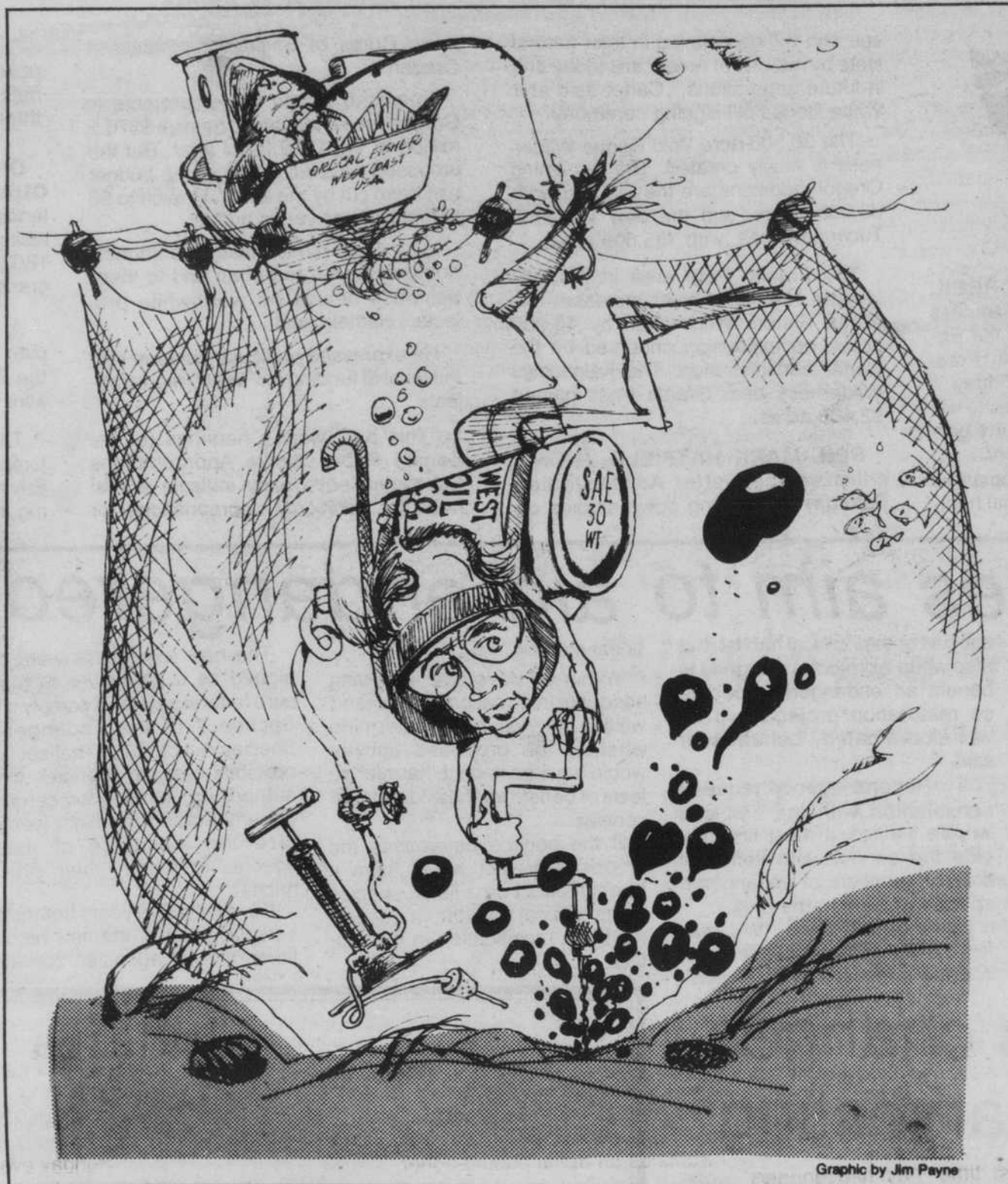
The potential lease area covers about two-thirds of California's 1,100-mile coastline and takes in some of the coast's most scenic areas, including such nationally known tourist spots as Big Sur.

Although several specific coastal areas may face stiff opposition from environmentalists, Thomas Hovet, a University political scientist professor and ocean politics specialist, says he expects little overall protest.

Fears from environmentalists that oil rigs would increase pollution might be legitimate, but Hovet adds that 90 percent of all ocean pollution comes not from ships or oil leaks but from land via rivers.

Both Hovet and MacLeod agree that California's protest against the proposed offshore drilling would be minimal because California is industrially oriented, unlike environmentally conscious Oregon.

If the oil companies strike oil and continue probing along the



Graphic by Jim Payne

coast into Oregon, MacLeod says a strong protest could be mounted by well-organized environmental groups and by various fishing groups — the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and the All-Coast Fisherman's Market-

ing Association.

But Oregon fisherman who sail off the Northern California coast seem to be holding their breath on the issue.

Bob Hudson, business agent for the All-Coast Fisherman's Marketing Association in Charles-

ton, says the attitude of most Oregon fisherman is "trust 'em and watch 'em."

"We're sitting on the oil industry's shoulders, after all, who was here first," he says.

Is Hudson skeptical of offshore oil drilling?

"It bothers me a little," he says. "The ocean is just a lot of water to some people, but to fishermen it's chopped up into little squares."

"They know where the reefs are, where the good fishing grounds are and where the breeding grounds are," Hudson adds. "I talked to some Gulf of Mexico fishermen and they said one problem was the garbage thrown off the oil rigs gets caught in the fishing gear. Capped wells especially present a problem."

Bottom nets can snag on the capped wells, ruining the \$5,000 to \$10,000 nets, Hudson says.

Fishermen fear problems aside from pollution

But California's coastal problems are not just California's. Of the estimated 3,000 boats in the Oregon fishing fleet, some 500 to 1,000 boats fish the northern California coast, says Bob Loeffel, the marine regional supervisor for the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in Newport.

Most of the Oregon fleet fish for salmon, but some are after shrimp and dungeness crab, Loeffel says.

He believes the proposed offshore drilling will have minimal effect upon the Oregon fishing fleet.

"If (the offshore platforms) are kept clean and minimized in number and size, the impact will be small," he says.

Currently no plans exist to allow Northern California drilling in state-controlled waters, which extend three miles offshore.

But drilling platforms on federal leases 10 to 12 miles off Northern California would be visible from shore on a clear day, says Bill Grant, manager of the BLM's Pacific Outer Continental Shelf Office.

The leasing area covers 17,000 square miles, extending up to 70 miles past state waters and ranging in depth from 66 to 12,540 feet.

U.S. Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif., urged Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus in a January letter to remove certain areas from the leasing program, which federal officials say is designed to cut dependence on foreign oil.

Cranston asked that drilling platforms be banned where they could be seen from two state coastal sanctuaries and Point Reyes National Seashore or where currents could carry oil into those areas.

The sanctuaries cover San Luis Obispo, Monterey and Santa Cruz counties and the Bear Mattole area near Eureka.

Cranston also urged drilling be banned in established sea lanes and that all leasing in the area be held up until Congress acts on pending coastal management legislation.

The Sierra Club also wants Andrus to ban drilling in certain areas and to delay leasing until Congress approves a coastal bill.

"There are areas in Northern California that are totally inappropriate from the standpoint of oil and gas development — Point Reyes, the North Coast, Golden Gate National Recreation Area," said Norbert Dall, the environmental group's California coastal coordinator.

"In those areas we think that any kind of development would be totally inappropriate just because of conflict with recreation re-

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Monday, February 27, 1978

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