

Now past Portland protesters, Shell prepares for Arctic drilling

By DAN JOLING
Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Hours after a repaired Shell icebreaker eased past protesters in Oregon to join an Arctic drilling operation, the oil giant used other vessels in its flotilla to begin excavating off the coast of Alaska in hopes of confirming the presence of billions of barrels of crude below the ocean floor.

Royal Dutch Shell PLC now only needs the 380-foot Fennica, repaired at a Portland shipyard, to be on hand at the drill site to ask federal regulators for permission to dig into oil-bearing rock already included on its Arctic offshore leases.

The drilling would come over the protests of environmental groups in Portland and elsewhere who say Shell has not proved it can clean up a major spill in a region covered by ice much of the year.

Critics have decried Arctic offshore drilling since before the federal government auctioned off billions of dollars in leases to Shell and other companies in 2008. But after failed lawsuits and protests, opponents have few options to stop drilling.

Protesters seized one of their last chances this week after the Fennica was gashed by an underwater obstruction in the Aleutian Islands and sent to Portland for repairs.

Thirteen members of Greenpeace USA dangled from a bridge over the Willamette River and kayakers converged on the Fennica to block the repaired icebreaker from heading toward the Pacific Ocean and on to Alaska.

The Greenpeace protesters persisted even after a federal court judge in Anchorage ordered \$2,500 hourly fines. They were finally removed by authorities. Two people were arrested.



AP Photo/Don Ryan

Boaters gather as the Royal Dutch Shell PLC icebreaker Fennica heads under a railroad bridge and up the Willamette River in Portland Thursday.

The U.S. Geological Survey estimates U.S. Arctic offshore reserves at 26 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 130 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Shell officials have said offshore Alaska offers some of the most prolific, undeveloped hydrocarbon basins in the world, a potential game-changer that could increase domestic supply by more than 1 million new barrels of oil a day.

Environmental groups see only harm: a potential new source of fossil fuel that will delay a transition to renewables; industrial activity in a region already hammered by global warming and shrinking sea ice; a potential major spill that can't be cleaned up in the home of polar bears, walrus, ice seals and threatened whales.

The federal Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement on July 22 granted conditional approval to Shell to begin drilling top sections of two wells in the Chukchi Sea.

Shell was not allowed to drill into

oil-bearing zones because the Fennica was not on hand. Its main purpose is to carry and maneuver a capping stack, a roughly 30-foot device that when lowered into place with help from a remote, underwater-operated vehicle, can act like a spigot to stop a blowout.

The capping stack must be pre-staged and available for use within 24 hours for Shell to gain permission to drill into hydrocarbon zones.

Shell did not have an estimated time when the Fennica would reach the drill site after traveling across the Gulf of Alaska, through the Bering Sea and into the Chukchi.

Shell spokesman Curtis Smith said initial work on the first well could last until the third week of August and that the Fennica would not be required until then.

Drilling in the Chukchi has occurred before, he said.

"There have been five wells drilled in the Chukchi and Shell drilled four of them," Smith said, the last in 1991.

Wildfires blackening California's dry hills

Associated Press

LOWER LAKE, Calif. — Wildfires blackened the golden hills of California on Friday, egged on by bone-dry vegetation, triple-digit temperatures and gusting winds.

Flames consumed a handful of homes and chased hundreds of people from their houses, prompting Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a state of emergency for all of California on Friday.

Eighteen large fires are burning, mostly in the scorched northern half of the state, and California's incessant drought is making matters worse.

"They only need a little wind to allow them to burn at an explosive rate," said Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for the California Department of Fire and Forestry Protection.

Crews hope for cooler weather this weekend but fear dry thunderstorms will bring more lightening, which has already sparked dozens of small fires, many along the Mendocino Coast.

Brown said the declaration would help speed up help for thousands of fire-fighters working to corral the blazes. As part of the order, he activated the California National Guard to help with disaster recovery.

BURNING HILLS



AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

Fires approach a home near Lower Lake, Calif., Friday.

A fast-spreading wildfire north of San Francisco has torched a third home and is threatening more than 450 structures.

At least 650 residents have been evacuated from their homes as the blaze raged in hills covered in dense brush and oak trees and dotted with ranch homes. It has charred 23 square miles near Lower Lake, south of Clear Lake, a popular summer recreation spot.

It was only 5 percent contained Friday.

Resident Julie Flannery said she saw the fire behind her house, so she gathered some valuables and sought a safer place, leaving behind two horses and a mule.

Returning on Friday, the animals were gone and the stable doors open, and

Flannery said she believes fire crews removed them.

"The rest of this is just material stuff," she said. "The animals and the family is the most important."

LINES HOLDING

Crews battling a fire east of Napa Valley held their ground Friday, more than a week after it started.

The blaze has charred more than 12 square miles in Solano County. The fire is about 45 miles east of Napa's wine county, and vineyards are not threatened.

At least 136 structures are threatened, but evacuation orders have been lifted. It mostly contained, and crews are expecting to have it fully

corralled by Monday.

FOOTHILLS FIRES

A woman was arrested in connection with a small fire near Groveland, a stop-off point for travelers headed to Yosemite National Park.

The 200-acre fire, about 20 miles from the park's entrance, was partially contained Friday. About two dozen homes are threatened and voluntary evacuations are in place.

Lisa Ann Vilmur was arrested Thursday night for recklessly causing a fire and jailed on \$100,000 bail. It was not known Friday if she has an attorney.

In a separate foothills blaze northeast of Sacramento, evacuation orders have been lifted for residents of 50 homes. The fire burned through more than 3 1/2 square miles and is almost fully contained.

BASS LAKE BLAZE

Residents of 200 homes in the central California community of Cascadel Woods were ordered to evacuate Thursday.

A wildfire burning near Bass Lake for several days spread to more than 6 square miles and is partially percent contained.

BRIEFLY

Clinton releases tax, health records on busy Friday

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hillary Rodham Clinton and her husband paid close to \$44 million in federal taxes since 2007 and she is in "excellent physical condition" — two facts that emerged Friday in a flood of disclosures about the Democratic presidential candidate pushed out by her campaign on a busy summer day.

Within a three-hour period, the State Department made public more than 2,200 pages of emails sent from Clinton's personal account, her campaign released a letter from her personal doctor about her health and she unveiled eight years of tax returns. Meanwhile, Clinton herself was campaigning at the annual meeting of the National Urban League and calling for an end of the nation's trade embargo of Cuba during a speech in Miami.

Friday was also the deadline for super PACs to file their first financial reports of the 2016 campaign with federal regulators, revealing the names of a slew of billionaires and millionaires paying for the early days of the 2016 election.

Campaign aides cast the records dump as part of an effort to compete with Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush on the issue of transparency. Clinton is the first 2016 presidential candidate to release her health records, and aides said she released more detail about her finances than Bush, the former Florida governor who has already made public 33 years of his tax returns. Republicans did not buy it.

The Clintons earned more than \$139 million between 2007 and 2014, according to the returns, and made almost \$15 million in charitable contributions — including a \$3 million donation to their family foundation in 2014. Last year, they paid an overall federal tax rate of 35.7 percent.

Judge blocks release of recordings by anti-abortion group

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge on Friday blocked the release of any recordings made at meetings of an abortion providers' association by an anti-abortion group that previously revealed secretly recorded videos of a Planned Parenthood leader.

Judge William Orrick

in San Francisco issued a temporary restraining order against the Center for Medical Progress hours after the order was requested by the National Abortion Federation.

In his three-page order, Orrick said the federation would likely suffer irreparable injury absent a temporary restraining order "in the form of harassment, intimidation, violence, invasion of privacy, and injury to reputation."

The National Abortion Federation sued in federal court in San Francisco, alleging that the Center for Medical Progress infiltrated its meetings and recorded its members. The group says release of any audio or video would put members in danger.

"The safety and security of our members is our top priority," Vicki Saporta, association president and CEO, said in a statement. "That security has been compromised by the illegal activities of a group with ties to those who believe it is justifiable to murder abortion providers."

David Daleiden, a leader of the Center for Medical Progress who is also named in the suit, said in a statement that Planned Parenthood and its allies were trying to silence the group and suppress investigative journalism.

Zimbabwe: American lion killer's extradition being sought

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Zimbabwe will seek the extradition of an American dentist who killed a lion that was lured out of a national park and caused international outrage, a Cabinet minister said Friday.

In the Zimbabwean government's first official comment on the killing of Cecil the lion, the environment, water and climate minister lashed out at Walter James Palmer, accusing him even of trying to hurt Zimbabwe's image.

On Tuesday, Palmer issued a statement saying he relied on his guides to ensure the hunt was legal. Two Zimbabweans — a professional hunter and a farm owner — have been arrested in the killing of the lion, an act which has garnered worldwide condemnation. Palmer has kept a low profile, but on Friday U.S. federal wildlife authorities said they have been contacted by his representative.

A State Department official said that, as far as the department knows, the U.S. has not extradited anyone to the Zimbabwe.

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