

# NOGS LOG



January 2008

Volume 48, Number 7

## Upcoming Events and Activities

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### January 7 - NOGS Luncheon

\*\*\* At the Holiday Inn Downtown Superdome \*\*\*

Free validated parking in hotel garage

Eric Stromboe, Chevron Deepwater Appraisal, will present "Appraisal Update and Review, Jack and St. Malo Projects, Deepwater Gulf of Mexico."

(See Page 7 for Abstract and Biographies)

HOLIDAY INN DOWNTOWN SUPERDOME	ADMISSION:
Check with concierge or front desk for location	<b>with reservation</b> ..... \$30.00 <b>without reservation</b> ..... \$35.00
Lunch served at 11:30am	Student Member with reservation ..... Free

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### January 24-25 - Natural and Anthropogenic Subsidence Impact on Louisiana Coasts Symposium

Hosted by the Baton Rouge Geological Society. Energy Coast & Environment Building,  
LSU Campus, Baton Rouge. See announcement on page 12.

For more information visit BRGS website <http://www.brgs-la.org>

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### February 11 - NOGS Luncheon

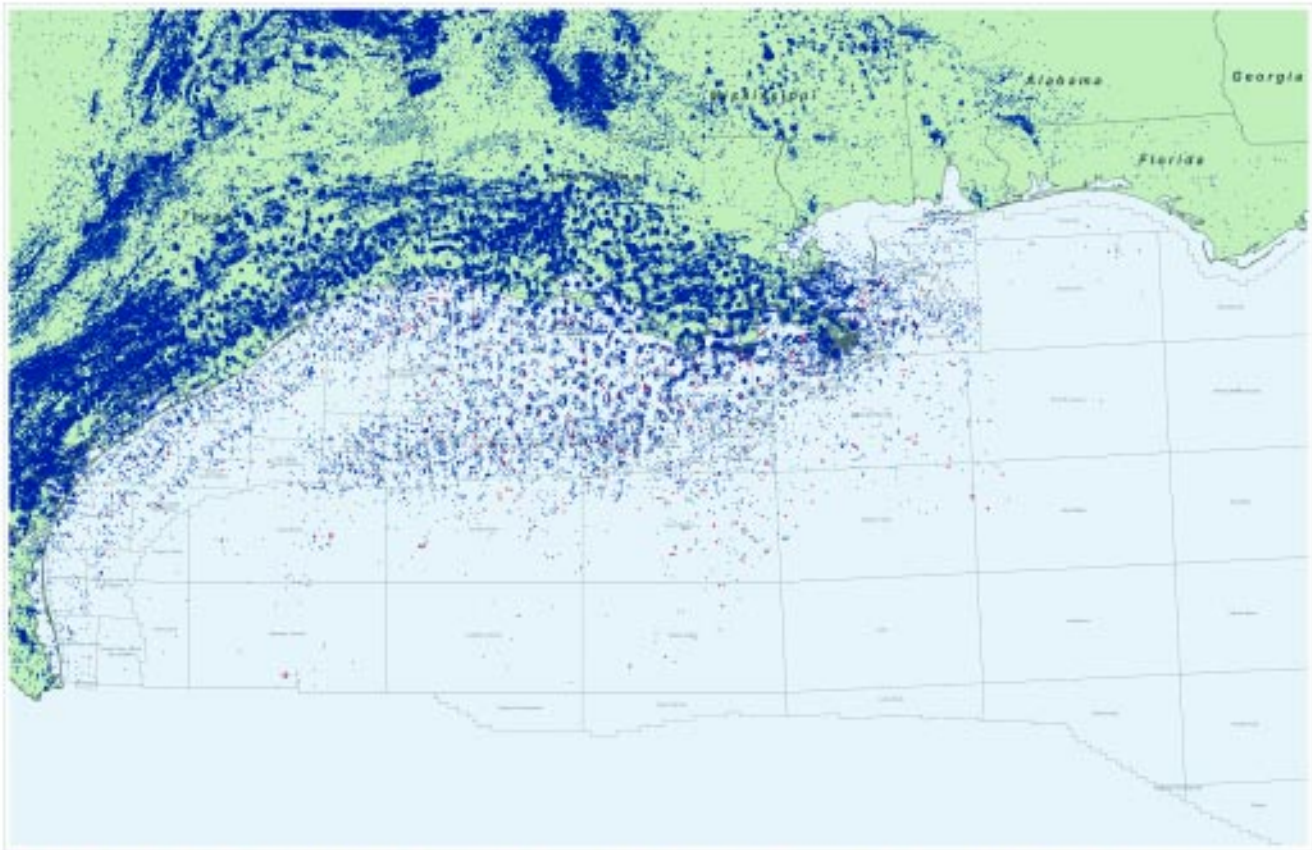
Usula Hammes, Research Assistant for the Bureau of Economic Geology in Austin, will  
present "All Fill-No Spill: Slope-Fan Sand Bodies and Sequence Stratigraphy of Growth-  
Faulted Subbasins: Oligocene Frio Formation, South Texas Gulf Coast, USA".

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### March 6-7 - 2nd Annual Louisiana Groundwater Symposium

Hosted by the Baton Rouge Geological Society. Energy Coast & Environment Building,  
LSU Campus, Baton Rouge. See announcement on page 15.

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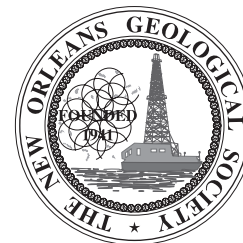
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 Correspondence and all luncheon reservations should be sent to the above address.  
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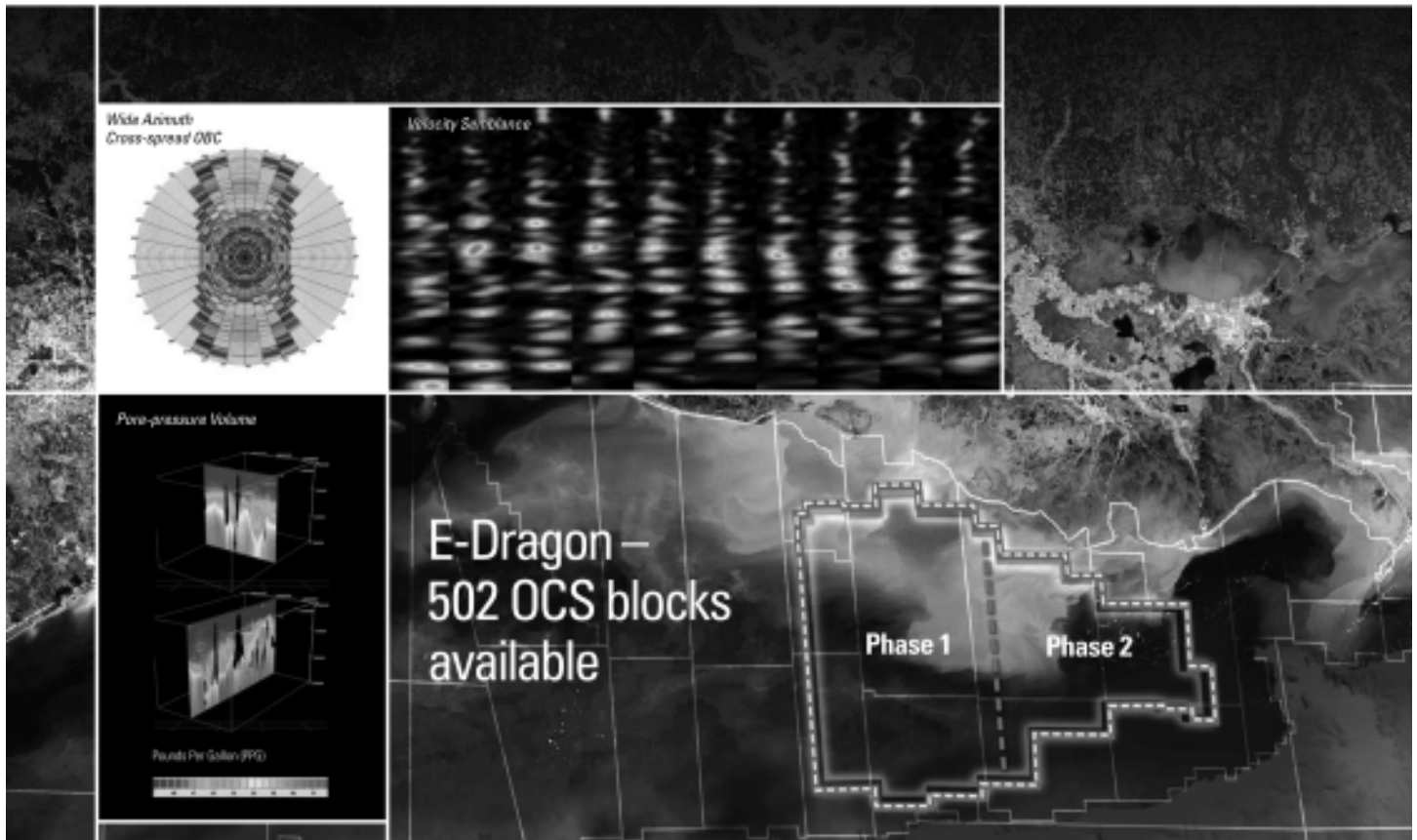
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*from the President*

## **A New Horizon**

One of the great frustrations of living and working in Southeast Louisiana is the poor business climate, particularly with the city of New Orleans. While the city has been spending up to \$1.2 million per year on economic development, little has been accomplished for many decades.

I am inherently skeptical when a new program is rolled out in New Orleans, but the new plan for business development rolled out at the end of November looks very promising. The organization behind it all is the "Horizon Initiative", a non-profit business group formed in 2006. They hired the RAND Corporation to develop recommendations for the most effective organizational and strategic approaches to revitalizing the city's economy. During the past two decades, the implementation of other RAND studies has led to the turnaround of a number of other cities including Charlotte, Jacksonville, and Pittsburgh.

The RAND study was presented to the New Orleans City Council on November 28, with the initial recommendation including the formation of a public-private partnership and a strategic approach to redeveloping the New Orleans economy. You can read the entire RAND report at their web site ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)), but the centerpiece is the creation of a central agency, co-funded by government and the private sector, with the membership selected by the business community, NOT politicians. The surprising result of the presentation to the City Council was that the vote was unanimous in favor of adopting the recommendations and contributing the city's \$1.5 million share of the initial costs. There were a couple of very minor points of disagreement in the 5-hour session that were eventually resolved, although the article in the Times-Picayune gave the impression that there was no agreement at all. The articles in City Business and Gambit Weekly captured the session and its outcome very accurately.

As far as what this means for NOGS members, the RAND study pointed to the oil and gas industry as an important component of the New Orleans economy that should be encouraged to grow, and a key goal is to find the niches where growth can be encouraged. In that respect, the Horizon Initiative has already begun soliciting input. I would ask all of our interested members to participate in the forums that are being held. (As I write this, the first forum is scheduled for December 13, a couple of weeks before you will receive this). I will try my best to keep you posted.

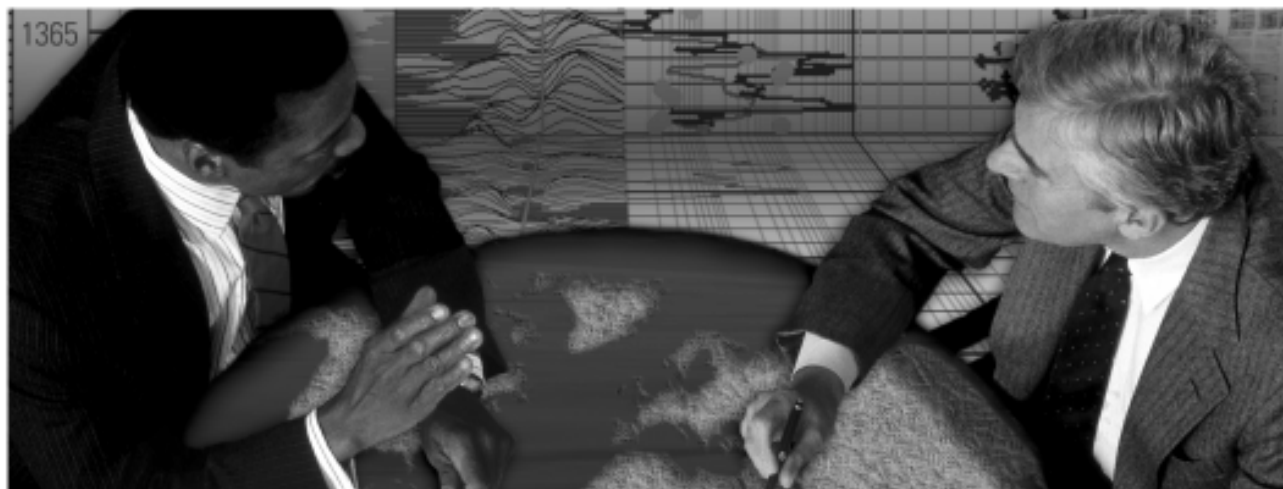
One side note to the Horizon Initiative is that they consistently use the word "YES" in their forums and communications, usually with an exclamation point. Their theme is "YES! to Business". All of the "YES" talk made me curious. When I asked about it, they noted that because New Orleans is abbreviated as "NO", the word "NO" shows up in some ways that puts us in a bad light. The website for the city's recovery was "norecovery.com". The business development site was "nobusiness.com". This certainly puts a negative face on all the city tries to do. The plan from the Horizon Initiative and the RAND study is to change the city's approach to business to "YES".

I will be the first to admit that there are many challenges ahead for New Orleans and the surrounding parishes. Our poor business climate has a long history and that will not change overnight. But the commitments by Shell, Eni, and others to stay (or even expand operations) in the city are a real source of hope. With the proper support and input, New Orleans has a great chance for improvement.

2008 will no doubt bring us all challenges and opportunities - as individuals, as families, as a community, and as a nation. I wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year.

*Art Johnson*

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## **Schlumberger**

**January 7 Luncheon Presentation**  
\*\*\* at the Holiday Inn Downtown Superdome \*\*\*

**Appraisal Update and Review, Jack and St. Malo Projects,  
Deepwater Gulf of Mexico**

presented by  
**Eric Stromboe, Chevron Deepwater Appraisal**

**ABSTRACT**

The Jack and St. Malo projects are part of an emerging Wilcox equivalent, Eocene/ Paleocene Deepwater Gulf of Mexico play. Located in Walker Ridge 758/759 and 678, approximately 250 miles southwest of New Orleans, Louisiana, the discoveries are four-way closures near the edge of the advancing Sigsbee Salt Canopy. The subsalt projects, each with two wells to date, are in ~ 7,000 feet of water and separated by approximately 25 miles.

Jack and St. Malo reservoirs have several characteristics in common, including: gross pay

sections greater than 1000 ft, low permeability reservoir, large closures, and significant volumes of oil in place. They also share common uncertainties, the most critical being reservoir quality and distribution. To address reservoir uncertainty an extended well test was performed on the Wilcox 1 Reservoir in the Jack #2 well during the summer of 2006. The first flow test of the Deepwater Wilcox play to date, it flowed at a maximum rate of 6,000 BOPD with ~40 percent of the total pay section contributing.

-- continued on page 19 --

**BIOGRAPHY**

**Eric Stromboe** is a geologist with Chevron Deepwater Appraisal in Houston, Texas where he serves as Project Geologist for the Jack Discovery in Walker Ridge. A New Orleans native, Eric received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Geology from Louisiana State University in 1986 and a Masters Degree in Geology from the University of New Orleans in 1990. Eric joined Texaco in 1990 where he

worked South Texas for ten years, including exploring and developing the Wilcox Formation. After a brief period of time working the Gulf of Mexico Shelf, Eric moved to Deepwater where he spent five years developing the Petronius Field and exploring in the Viosca Knoll Area. Eric joined the Jack/St. Malo Appraisal Team in May of 2005.

**THE LUNCHEON RESERVATION DEADLINE IS JANUARY 2, SO CALL THE NOGS OFFICE - TODAY!**

**“And Looking Ahead...”**

The next NOGS luncheon will be February 11 at the Holiday Inn Downtown Superdome. Usula Hammes, Research Assistant for the Bureau of Economic Geology in Austin, will present "All Fill-No Spill: Slope-Fan Sand Bodies and Sequence Stratigraphy of Growth-Faulted Subbasins: Oligocene Frio Formation, South Texas Gulf Coast, USA". Contact the NOGS office to make your reservation.



NOGS President Art Johnson greets December speaker Steven Brachman at the Holiday Inn Downtown Superdome.

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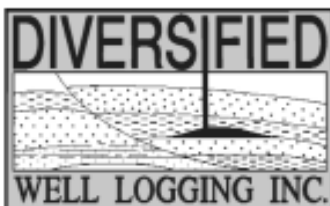
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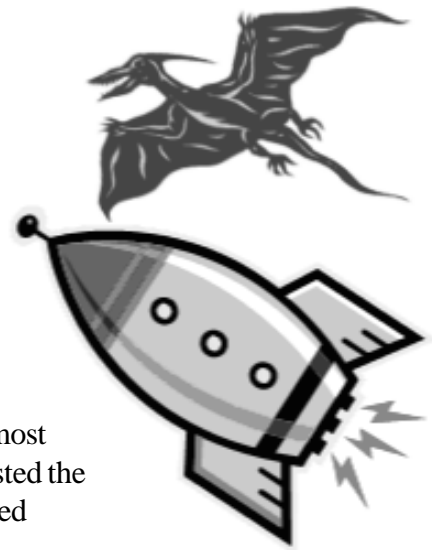
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# *Blast From NOGS Past*

**25 Years Ago (January 1983):** The Technical Projects Committee reported that NOGS had two new publications in the previous year: a volume on the Tuscaloosa Trend of Southern Louisiana, and a walking tour of New Orleans entitled "The Building Stones of New Orleans."

**35 Years Ago (January 1973):** George Severson's President's Corner congratulated Entertainment Chairman Jack Langford and his committee for "a most enjoyable Christmas Dance at the Saxony." 216 were in attendance. He also listed the "return" of Federal Lease sales, increased production, higher prices, and improved employment opportunities as reasons to consider 1972 a successful year.

**45 Years Ago (January 1963):** In the then regularly occurring "Know Your Society" column, Tom Fails wrote an extended biography of new NOGS President James Spillers which highlighted his service in the 4th Marine Defense Battalion stationed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



- *Tim Piwowar*

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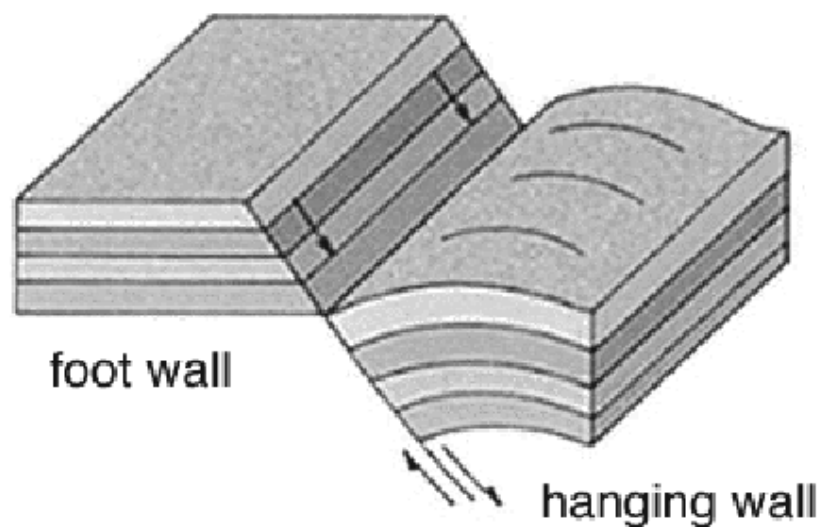
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## South Louisiana and Offshore Exploration and Production Activity

- In October, U.S. District Judge Patricia H. Minaldi of Lake Charles rejected the Department of Interior's (DOI) motion to throw out the deepwater royalty case bought against the government by Kerr-McGee (now Anadarko). The dispute centers around rules implemented by the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS) under the Outer Continental Shelf Deepwater Royalty Relief Act of 1995 (DWRRA), a 1995 law designed to encourage exploration in the deep-water GoM, potentially boosting domestic oil and gas production. The issue was the government's interpretation that companies are not entitled to royalty relief based on price thresholds. In the ruling, Judge Minaldi wrote that Kerr-McGee was correct and that the Interior had overstepped its authority by requiring the company to pay royalties based on price threshold provisions. The judge also rejected all of the government's technical justifications for the rules in the event that it lost the argument over its Congressional mandate.

The ruling is not a final verdict. Oil companies won a similar suit in 2003 involving the same law. The DOI says it fundamentally disagrees with the decision, and said it was exploring all options to reverse it, including help from Congress.

Royalties on oil and gas are one of the government's larger sources of revenue after income and payroll taxes. Last year, royalties totaled more than \$10 billion, and high prices should drive those numbers even higher this year. The U.S. Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, last year estimated that an industry victory in the case could cost the government \$60 billion over the next 20 years. However, with oil prices now at record present dollar highs, that figure could be higher.

A victory by Anadarko would apply to all deepwater lease holding companies. Kerr-McGee sued the government last year, saying that Congress never authorized the DOI to impose the high-price restriction, even though lawmakers who drafted the law have often said that was their specific intent. Anadarko argued that the U.S. Congress guaranteed companies acquiring deepwater leases between 1996 and 2000 would have the unconditional right to produce a specified volume of oil and/or gas before being charged royalties. The company claimed the MMS attempted to charge royalties on the leases, based on threshold prices for oil and gas, even though production volumes had not been exceeded that threshold. The court agreed.

"Because the Interior imposed price threshold requirements on Kerr-McGee's eight deepwater leases that would require Kerr-McGee to pay millions of dollars in royalties before it had even produced the minimum volume of royalty-free production, the Interior exceeded its Congressional authority," Judge Minaldi wrote.

Royalties from deepwater GoM leases have been widely disputed by companies. Some companies point to MMS rules for 1998 and 1999, which neglected to include "price triggers" requiring companies to pay royalties if oil and gas prices rose above a certain threshold, even though those triggers were included in previous and subsequent years.

In a statement issued after the verdict, Anadarko Chairman, President and CEO Jim Hackett said: "The court upheld what we believe was the intent of Congress to assure that companies were afforded the royalty treatment it granted as an incentive to make huge investments in the deepwater Gulf of Mexico frontier. The incentives provided under the Outer Continental Shelf Deepwater Royalty Relief Act of 1995 (DWRRA) continue to provide value for American consumers in the form of the energy that we and other



deepwater operators have produced, as well as the jobs that have been created. This energy continues to contribute to the health, welfare and security of our nation."

"The concern over today's energy prices highlights the importance of increasing the supply of affordable resources. The DWRRRA was a good example of sound energy policy that was very successful in establishing a reliable source of domestically produced energy. The lease bonuses, royalties, and income taxes on deepwater production paid to the federal government have grown markedly since 1995. Also, none of the leases involved in this decision are 'royalty free' - all provide for royalty on production after volume thresholds are exceeded. We are pleased with this district court decision affirming the industry's adherence to the law in its efforts to increase supply," Hackett added.

Still, most oil companies drilling in the Gulf have agreed to negotiate royalty payments with the MMS. Democratic lawmakers in Congress have been trying to address the oil and gas royalties as part of a broader energy bill, but the House and Senate have been stalled for months by differences on royalties and other issues. The House energy bill, passed early this summer, would prohibit companies from acquiring additional offshore leases if they did not agree to pay royalties during times of high prices. In the Senate, Republican lawmakers blocked Democrats this summer from including any provisions to raise taxes on oil companies.

- In an era where government take (the sum of royalties, state participation, taxes, etc.) on old and new leaseholds is being increased in countries considered to have a high political risk; e.g., Russia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, etc., the US has increased its government take; but, to be fair, only on new GoM leases. On 1 November, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) raised the royalty rate for new oil and gas leases in the GoM, the second increase in less than a year. MMS said the rate for leases in two March 2008 GoM sales will be 18.75%. Gary Strasburg, an MMS spokesman, said the rate would apply to other future GoM sales as well.

The move comes roughly nine months after MMS announced that the royalty rate for new deepwater leases would be increased from 12.5% to 16.7%. Strasburg said the changes followed an analysis of royalty rates requested by President Bush. "The analysis determined that an increase in royalty rates on new Gulf of Mexico offshore federal oil and gas leases would benefit the American public through increased federal revenue," noting the increase is expected to boost revenue from the two March lease sales by about \$4.3 billion over 30 years. It will have a "slight" downward effect on production initially but will even out over time, he added. (Who said there is no "political or economic risk" in the U.S.? These risks are everywhere, in some form. Although, again, to be fair, this is only for NEW GoM leases, and is not retroactive to existing leases.)

A Government Accountability Office report released earlier this year found that the U.S. government takes a smaller cut of oil and gas revenues than many other energy producing nations.

American Petroleum Institute spokesman Bill Bush (obviously no relation to the President) stated "We consider this a disincentive to producing more supply... This is not a time to be increasing royalty rates when we should be increasing oil and gas production to meet growing demand."

The MMS announcement was in notices announcing Central and Eastern GoM sales that will be held March 19, 2008. Sale 206 will offer about 5,000 Central GoM blocks encompassing 28.5 million acres off Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Sale 224, also planned for March 19, comprises more than 500,000 acres in the eastern GoM. MMS is required to offer this acreage under legislation Congress approved in 2006 that opened more than 8 million gulf acres to new leasing. Under provisions in this bill, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas will share 37.5 percent of the revenues from leases in this sale.

- In an analysis recently completed as part of Wood Mackenzie's Exploration Service, higher oil prices are offsetting the greater challenges faced by companies who explore for oil and gas - but only just. The average return on exploration for conventional hydrocarbons in the past three years was just under 15% - assuming that oil prices remain at US\$70 per barrel in real terms.

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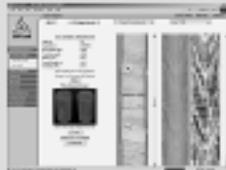
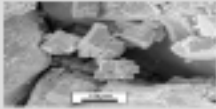
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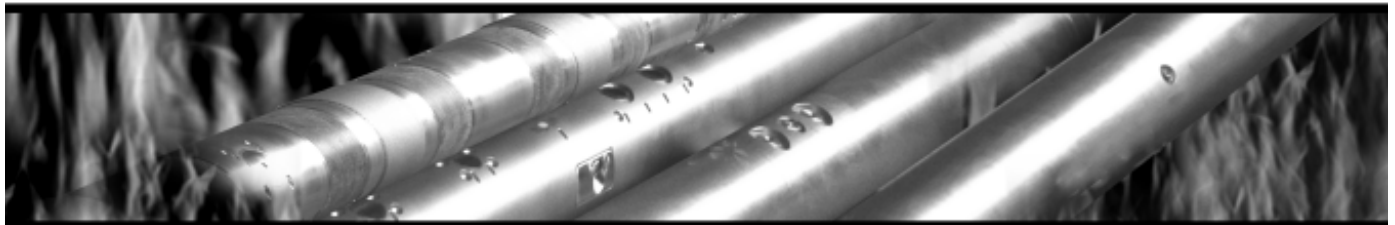
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A similar analysis completed by Wood Mackenzie in 2005 showed that this level of return could be achieved with an oil price assumption of US\$30 per barrel in real terms.

Andrew Latham, Vice President of Exploration Service for Wood Mackenzie explains: "We have seen a fundamental shift in the economics of wildcat exploration in the last two years. There are a number of factors which are reducing full cycle returns from exploration - some have already had an effect on explorers, whilst the full impact of others has not yet shown up in economic returns."

Latham continued: "The most significant impact on returns in the last three years has been the increase in the expected cost of developing new discoveries - particularly in the offshore sector. Rising global demand has driven drilling, subsea and production facilities costs steeply upwards. A number of high profile re-forecasts of development costs in recent years have thrown this into sharp relief."

"The impact of government policy is a much bigger issue when looking at the exploration opportunities of the near future. The cost of new acreage in prospective basins has been pushed up by the increased use of public bidding rounds. These auctions reduce the exploration investors' potential returns for those willing to bid aggressively, and limits the ability to operate for the rest," Latham continued. "With many of the most petroleum-rich parts of the world effectively off-limits to international oil companies, accepting moderate returns at high oil prices may be the only way for companies to continue to be active in conventional exploration for hydrocarbons."

Wood Mackenzie warns that the costs of exploration itself have also increased - the amount spent per well drilled has risen by 60% since 2004. Wood Mackenzie believes this trend will continue over the next two years, further diluting returns, as the number of wells drilled by rigs on older and cheaper charters decreases.

In addition to costs, the economic rent taken by host governments also has a major impact on the returns which can be expected by investors in exploration. Latham concludes: "Many of the well publicized changes in contract terms and governmental attitude to the oil and gas industry have not significantly impacted explorers' revenues - yet. The majority of recent exploration is based around licenses which were negotiated in the 1990s, with fiscal terms more favourable than could be negotiated today."

*- Paul Post*

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### **January 7 Luncheon Presentation Abstract**, continued from page 7

Although the well test at Jack showed economic rates can be attained from these reservoirs, the variability in permeability between wells is poorly understood. Permeability distribution across the structure remains the primary uncertainty for both projects - as well as the trend. The team is assessing the relative effect on permeability variation due to compaction and diagenetic histories, facies controls, and structural movement. Petrologic studies, basin analyses, and stress field analyses are currently underway at Jack and St. Malo to address the issue.

Additional subsurface uncertainties affecting Jack and St. Malo reserve calculations are structural closure, fault compartmentalization, and fluid properties. The poor seismic image below rugose salt bodies makes interpretation of closure and fault patterns difficult. In these large, gently dipping structures, slight interpretational differences equate to significant reserve adjustments, and compartmentalization due to faulting can reduce recovery by limiting a wells drainage area and access to reservoir energy. Efforts to acquire a better seismic image early in the appraisal and development process are ongoing, with acquisition of a WATTS seismic survey over Jack underway, and a newly acquired 3D survey over St. Malo.

Additional appraisal wells are planned for each project with wells scheduled to be drilled in late 2007 and into 2008.

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- **Coastal Restoration in New Orleans Funded through Offshore Production Revenue:** In late November, the MMS approved Louisiana's plan to spend \$255 million over the next two years on specified coastal restoration projects. The funds are generated through offshore production revenue under the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP), which was authorized as a part of the July 2005 Energy Bill, and will be divided between the 15 south Louisiana coastal parishes, including Orleans. One of the projects is the East Orleans Land Bridge Shoreline Protection and Marsh Creation Project, in which up to 1,000 acres of wetlands will be created by placing dredged material and planting marsh vegetation in the Alligator Bend area along the northwest shoreline of Lake Borgne. The goals of this project are to inhibit breaching between the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) and Lake Borgne as well as mitigate wetland destruction that occurred as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

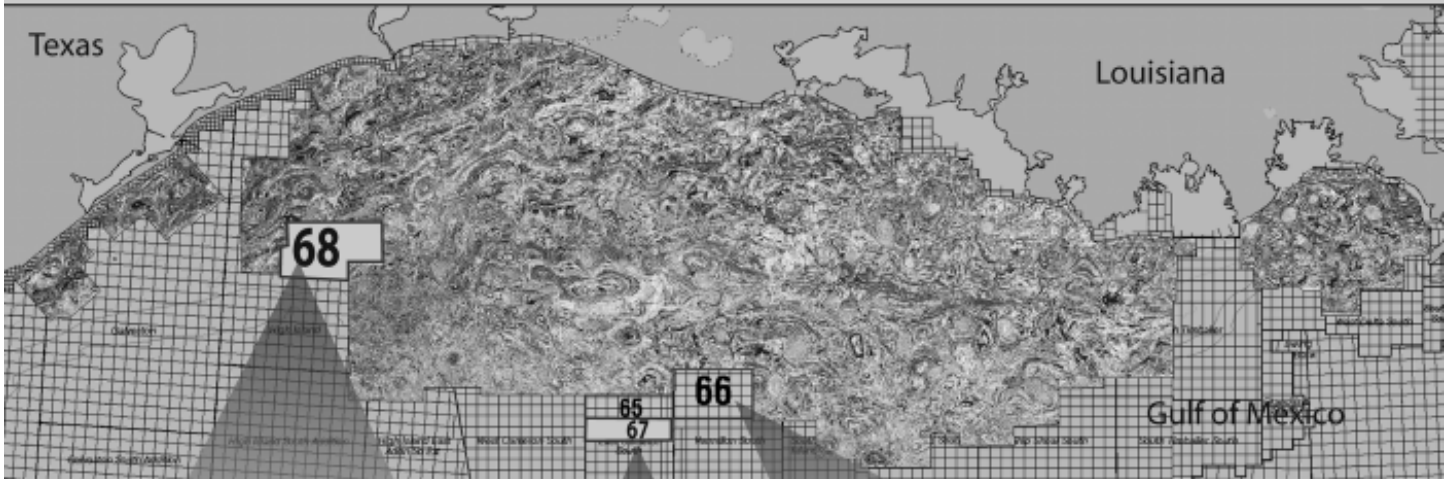
More info at: <http://dnr.louisiana.gov/crm/ciap/ciap.asp>

- **Take a Flying Tour over Antarctica:** The Landsat Image Mosaic of Antarctica (LIMA) is a complete, high-resolution map of the frozen continent that was recently released by a team of researchers from NASA, the U.S. Geological Survey, the National Science Foundation, and the British Antarctic Survey. The mosaic gives researchers and the public the ability to explore Antarctica through a free interactive web portal (no GIS software needed) at <http://lima.nasa.gov/>. Aside from the imagery there is a collection of Antarctic resources including fact sheets, downloadable maps, and a flying tour of the McMurdo region, in which the imagery has been draped over a digital elevation model.
- **Subsidence in Shanghai, China:** Shanghai, which means "above the sea" in Chinese, is located on the Yangtze River delta plain and was subsiding at a rate of 10 cm/yr in the 1960's. At that rate, the city was predicted to be submerged by 1999. Like many Asian cities experiencing rapid economic development and industrialization, most of the subsidence in Shanghai is attributed to groundwater withdrawal. The Shanghai Institute Geological Survey has developed a detailed model of the shallow stratigraphic framework underlying the city and a network of 50,000 wells set to monitor water table elevations in real-time. Efforts focused on curbing subsidence rates, such as limiting groundwater extraction and artificially injecting water into the subsurface, have resulted in reducing rates to ~0.8 cm/yr in recent years with a goal of 0.5 cm/yr by 2010.

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- *Mike Miner*

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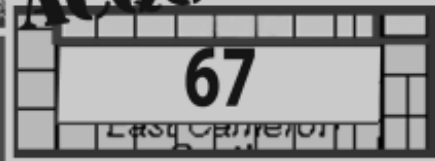


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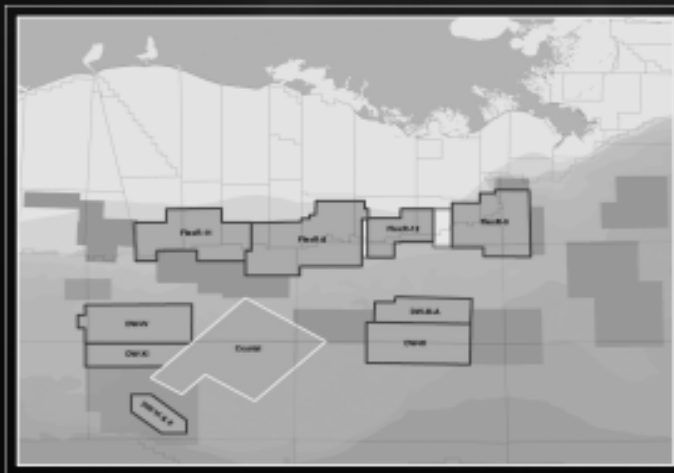
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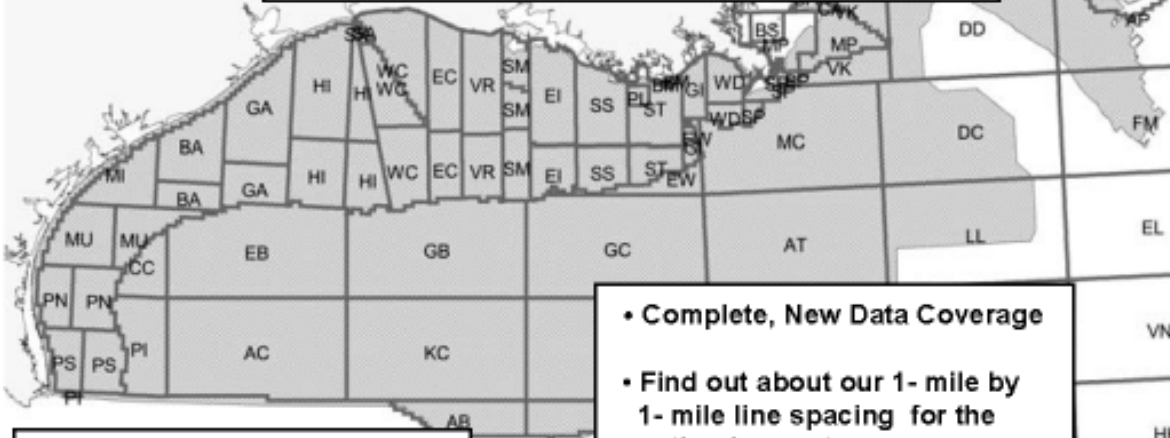
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