



Summerland Beach, 1915

Archival Photo

THE SUMMERLAND OIL MESS

Heal the Ocean started getting calls at our office during spring 2015 when the ever-popular Summerland Beach became fouled day after day with oil.

There are periodic but numerous oil leaks on Summerland Beach, because it was a chaotic scene of wildcatting in the late 1800s-early 1900s. Cited as the "first offshore oil field in the world," many wells were sunk off piers and in shallow waters. And in those days, when a wildcatter abandoned a well, the well was stuffed with rags and rocks, a bit of cement, and that was it.

Today, these improperly abandoned wells are leaking—fouling not only Summerland Beach, but neighboring beaches as well, depending on wind and tide.



March 3, 2016 Lookout Park, Summerland, by Harry Rabin/On the Wave Productions

One of the biggest culprits in this scenario is the uncapped and leaking Becker Onshore Well. When the tide is low, beach walkers can see the black oil bubbling up from it.

The **State Lands Commission (SLC)** "owns" all improperly abandoned oil wells in California, so when HTO heard there was a SLC hearing scheduled in August 2015 in Orange County on the Summerland issue, we showed up to offer help. We told the SLC panel we would hire a consultant to get Proposition 1 Water Bond money to cap the Becker Onshore Well.

We hired **Dudek Environmental Engineering** to apply for the funding and SLC staff came to our office in Santa Barbara. Together we worked up a plan of action to get our Notice of Intent letter in for the Proposition 1 funding by the November 2015 deadline.

Big problem: we had to show that we had \$200K for CEQA, and all the way through to the November deadline, we couldn't find these funds anywhere. That was unfortunately the end of our grant application.

Meanwhile, State Lands moved forward with mapping and measuring the well.

Then, **Assemblyman Das Williams** successfully included line items into the State's proposed budget for FY 2016/2017 for the \$200K needed for CEQA, as well as an additional \$700K for FY 2017/2018 to pay for actual project construction. HTO mounted significant public advocacy to keep these funds in place through the end of the budget process, gathering many letters from our members and supporters to send up to Sacramento. Heal the Ocean is keeping an eye on this issue, and on its resolution.

SB 900 - OIL CLEANUP ACT

The Becker Onshore Well is just one uncapped oil well problem along the California Coast, and in January 2016, Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson introduced SB 900, the Coastal Oil Well Cleanup Act. The bill, among other things, will create a program to address over 200 oil wells in California's coastal waters that are improperly abandoned and leaking oil into the ocean. We applaud Senator Jackson for her work on this issue.

Getting a Grip on Waste(d)water Management

HTO COLLABORATING WITH DWR ON STATE INVENTORY PROJECT

Heal the Ocean has taken our "waste(d)water" campaign statewide.

James Hawkins, Policy Analyst for Heal the Ocean, has been working with the Water Recycling & Desalination Section at the State of California Department of Water Resources (DWR), on an inventory of all ocean discharges of wastewater in California. The goal is to estimate and document the volume of wastewater that could be reclaimed without adverse impacts to downstream water rights or environmental uses.

The final report will be launched during the summer of 2016, and be accessible to all.

HTO's "**California Ocean Wastewater Discharge Inventory**," published in 2010, found that coastal treatment plants were discharging approximately **1.3 billion gallons of wastewater per day** into the sea, representing a significant source of potential recycled water. While conservation measures in California's drought have likely reduced total wastewater discharges to an extent, it is expected that the updated report will show that California still has a significant supply of wastewater available to help alleviate water scarcity in the state.

HTO initiated the project in the spirit of the **California Water Action Plan**, which states that "working together and continued collaboration is essential" to achieve progress in California water management. Specifically, documenting the volume of wastewater potentially available for water recycling is a critical component for meeting the objectives of the Water Action Plan to achieve reliability, restoration, and resilience in California's water system.

Working with **Michael Ross** of DWR's Water Recycling & Desalination Section, James and HTO Operations Coordinator **Corey Radis** have consulted CIWQS/eSMR data portals, reviewed dischargers' NPDES permits, and contacted each of the six Regional Water Boards with coastal jurisdiction to ensure the lists are complete and accurate.

This project has the potential to fill in critical missing data points in California water management and ensure the protection of our limited water resources. It is our hope that the project will better inform the water debate at a time when we need to prioritize sustainable water resources, like recycled water.



Preliminary sites of municipal wastewater dischargers to the Pacific Ocean & coastal bays that are included in the state inventory. Note: not all dischargers are represented on this map.

HTO ORGANIZES GROUNDWATER BASIN ASSESSMENT

As part of our Waste(d)water campaign and effort to promote recycling/potable reuse projects, HTO organized a study of the Montecito groundwater basin, to determine whether the basin could be suitable for groundwater recharge with highly treated recycled water. We formed a three-way partnership with the **Montecito Water** and **Montecito Sanitary** districts to engage **Dudek Environmental Engineering** to perform the study.

Completed in September 2015, the study concluded that groundwater recharge is infeasible in Montecito. These results help the community decide on the next steps it might take for recycled water: Irrigation-quality water distributed through purple pipes does not have to be as highly treated as recycled water for groundwater recharge.