



Oil and Gas Reform

Florida's Orphaned Wells



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25

ORPHANED WELLS
IN FLORIDA

14

ORPHANED WELLS
NEAR NATIONAL
PARK SITES IN
FLORIDA

THE ISSUE

Orphaned oil and gas wells are a major concern for air and water quality and for their contribution to climate change. Due to a lack of sufficient financial incentives to ensure that oil and gas operators plug, remediate, and reclaim these wells, they are left leaking toxics into the environment and leave the clean-up job to taxpayers. Wells without accountable operators and dedicated funding to plug or reclaim them can sit unmonitored for decades. Increasingly, many companies go bankrupt and leave their wells behind and communities are left to deal with the aftermath.*

Across the country, many orphaned wells are in rural communities and on federal, state, Tribal, and private lands. With continued extractive oil and gas development, outdated policies, and a lack of oversight, taxpayers and local municipalities often carry the burden of cleanup and can suffer from health impacts of leaking orphaned wells polluting their air and groundwater.

WHAT IS AN ORPHANED WELL?

An “orphaned” oil and gas well is a well that is not actively being used for authorized purposes, such as production, injection, or monitoring, and for which either no operator can be found, or the operator is unable to permanently plug the well and remediate and reclaim the well site. Federal, Tribal and state definitions vary for abandoned, idle and orphaned wells. There are anywhere between thousands to millions of unidentified orphaned wells depending on how the wells are defined.

ORPHANED WELLS & NATIONAL PARK SITES IN FLORIDA

A new analysis by National Parks Conservation Association and FracTracker Alliance uncovered that there are 214,538 orphaned wells across the country; 31,737 of these are within 30 miles of a National Park Site, including:

- 25 orphaned wells in Florida, 14 of which are within 30 miles of a National Park Site
- 14 orphaned wells are within 30 miles of Big Cypress National Preserve
- 151 orphaned wells are located within 30 miles of Florida's Gulf Islands National Seashore in Florida's neighboring state of Alabama.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PARKS & PEOPLE

NPCA continues to work to prevent new oil and gas development, especially inside Florida's Big Cypress National Preserve. The imminent threat of new oil and gas development, and the legacy threat that orphaned oil wells pose, threaten Florida's iconic ecosystems and exacerbates the climate crisis. Remedying orphaned wells is also important because they contaminate groundwater, leak methane and other air pollutants that pose serious public health risks to Florida's diverse communities.

- Aquifers that provide public water supplies to Lee and Collier counties have experienced significant water quality declines, which may be a result of salt water intrusion partly caused by improperly abandoned agriculture and oil wells. **

Orphaned wells left unplugged deteriorate over time and as similarly as they can contaminate surface and groundwater supplies, they can also impair the many rivers and streams that can be core to the integrity of the park.

Cleaning up orphan wells can enhance land restoration efforts, protecting the health and safety our wildlife, migratory birds, and residents and communities nearby this abandoned energy infrastructure.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF CLEANUP

Cleaning up orphaned wells is not only good for the environment, it is also a job creator. A federal program to plug 500,000 orphaned wells could create as many as 120,000 jobs. Furthermore, it is an important down payment towards ensuring a just transition for legacy fossil fuel communities, providing oil and gas workers an opportunity to put their skillset to use.

THE SOLUTION – NPCA SUPPORTS:

- Opposing authorization of any new oil and gas development inside Big Cypress National preserve
- The use of federal funding to plug orphaned wells on state, private, Tribal, and federal public lands through a grant program established by the Department of Interior
- The establishment of a grant program by DOI Interior Secretary that provide funds to states and tribes to plug and reclaim wells on tribal, state, and privately owned lands
- Holding oil and gas companies accountable by eliminating nationwide bonds, increasing the minimum value of statewide bonds adjusted for inflation, and improving data collection to identify and remedy orphaned wells.

TAKE ACTION

SUPPORT LEGISLATION THAT WOULD CLEAN UP ORPHANED WELLS AND CREATE JOBS WHILE ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND ENSURING THAT THE PUBLIC IS PROTECTED.

*TELL YOUR REPRESENTATIVES TO COSPONSOR: **THE ORPHANED WELL CLEANUP AND JOBS ACT** and TELL YOUR SENATORS TO COSONPSOR: **THE OIL AND GAS BONDING REFORM AND ORPHANED WELLREMEDICATION ACT.***

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* <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-615.pdf>

**Rectenwald, E.E. et al., *Florida Water Resources Journal, Significant Water Quality Trends Observed in the Lower Hawthorn Aquifer of Southwest Florida: Occurrences & Solutions* (2008), available at: <https://www.fwrj.com/techarticles/0608%20tech%204.pdf>