The Oil Fields of the Los Angeles Basin

Coast and South Bay

Venice Oil Field
The Venice field was discovered late, in 1966, and shut down in the 1980s. Most of the oil was offshore. Mobil Oil built a directional drilling operation on the beach, at the end of Market Street, to get at it, through six wells. Due to its conspicuous location, the oil derrick was disguised as a lighthouse. It was taken down in the 1970s.

Playa del Rey Oil Field
The Playa del Rey Oil Field underlies the mouth of Ballona Creek and the man-made marina of Playa del Rey. A sizable undeveloped area along the banks of the channelized Ballona Creek contains all the remaining operating wells (though there are 100+ closed and capped wells under the condominiums, roads, and even under the waterways of the marina). The field produces little in the way of oil (43,500 barrels in 2008), but is a major natural gas storage area. Dozens of former oil and gas wells have been repurposed as injection wells, forcing natural gas, delivered by pipeline from all over the region, into the rock strata of the former oil field, far below below the surface. The gas, pressurized up to 2,400 psi to force it into liquid form, is extracted as needed to supply the businesses and homes of the Los Angeles region.

Portrero Oil Field
A small field located along the 105 freeway, west of the 110. Just a few remaining producing wells, on house lots between homes and businesses, mostly along 120th Street. Produces less than 10,000 barrels per year.

Hyperion Oil Field
Hyperion is a small oil field underlying the west end of LAX. There are only seven wells in the field, and currently only one that is producing oil. That well, known as Gamer Oil Lotus #1, is located behind the Hyperion Wastewater Treatment Plant. It produced almost 10,000 barrels in 2008.

El Segundo Oil Field
The El Segundo Oil Field produces less than 20,000 barrels annually, from three operating wells. The field is notable as it lies under the company town of El Segundo, and much of the petrochemical plant-Chevron’s El Segundo Refinery—that gives the town and the oil field its name. Two of the active wells are in the light industrial part of El Segundo, and one is on the northwestern edge of the refinery. Chevron’s El Segundo refinery is one of seven major refineries in the Southland, refining crude from the region, mostly from Kern County, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and from the Middle East.

Howard Townsite Oil Field
A small field located along the 106 freeway, west of the 110. Just a few remaining producing wells, on house lots between homes and businesses, mostly along 120th Street. Produces less than 10,000 barrels per year.

Rosencrans Oil Field
Rosencrans is a relatively small but productive field that underlies the industrial corridor of the 110 freeway south of the 105 towards Gardena, a corridor that is part in unincorporated Los Angeles County, and part in the narrow strand of the city of Los Angeles that connects downtown to the Port. The field consists of 46 active pumpjacks scattered along the railway, freeway, in industrial yards, parking lots, and a few house lots. It produces around 150,000 barrels per year.

East Rosencrans Oil Field
A tiny field, east of the Rosencrans Field, which has one operating well, that produced 1,600 barrels in 2008.

South Rosencrans Oil Field
A small field located at the southern end of the Rosencrans field. Produces around 12,500 barrels from a few wells.

Dominguez Oil Field
Located in Carson and an unincorporated part of LA County, and the southern part of Compton, the Dominguez Field is, historically, the sixth most productive field in LA County, producing over 275 million barrels since its discovery in 1923. Because the surface acreage was owned mostly by just three parties, it was developed in a more organized fashion than many of the fields brought in during that time, and as a result is nearly completely exhausted. Its production peaked in 1925, at 4 million barrels per year. In 2008, the few remaining active wells produced 7,700 barrels. The field has been redeveloped mostly into office parks, and into a branch of California State University.

Lawndale Oil Field
Until recently, the Lawndale Oil Field was a cluster of a few dozen wells in and around an industrial park and shopping center at Rosencrans and the 405 freeway. The last well ceased operating in 1995.

Alondra Oil Field
A small field south of Lawndale, underlying Alondra Park Golf Course and El Camino Community College, whose last well closed more than ten years ago.

Torrance Oil Field
Torrance is a major field, LA County’s second largest in area, extending from Hermosa Beach to Wilmington. It has extracted over 224 million barrels since its discovery in 1922, and is the 8th most productive in the county. Just over 100 isolated pumpjacks, individuals and small clusters, still operate in and around the housing developments, shopping centers, and along the edges of freeways, extracting 393,000 barrels in 2008. A large well pad in the harbor of Redondo Beach that contained dozens of wells, to access the offshore parts of the field, has been removed.

Thirteen oil fields underlie the flat lands of the cities of the Coast and South Bay, from Playa del Rey to Torrance. Extraction in this area has diminished, and the region is thoroughly developed. Still, pumpjacks can be seen next to shopping centers and office/warehouse complexes, extracting 668,000 barrels of oil in 2008.