The Oil Fields of the Los Angeles Basin
Westside to Downtown

The area extending from the 405 freeway to downtown is the most urbanized oil field in the nation. The region, spanning 13 miles, overlies a chain of 11 oil fields, where more than two million barrels of oil are extracted annually, from wells that are hidden within the urban fabric. It is here that the industry has evolved some of the most unusual characteristics of blending into a changing land, a sort of industrial disappearing act.

1. Sawtelle Oil Field
Sawtelle Oil Field is accessed through just one surface site, located next to the 405 freeway, on the grounds of the Veterans Administration campus on the west side of Los Angeles. 178,000 barrels of oil were produced here in 2008, through 18 active wells on site, some as deep as two miles down. The Brietburn Energy Company, a company that specializes in working the urban fields of Los Angeles, purchased the site in 2007.

2. Cheviot Hills Oil Field
The oil in the Cheviot Hills Field is accessed through well sites located on two separate golf courses, the Rancho Park Golf Course, and the Hillcrest Country Club. Golf courses are well suited to house oil drilling operations, as they provide space, a buffer from the surrounding community, and landscaping to conceal the operation. They also provide revenue for the owners, which in this case is the Hillcrest Beverly Oil Corporation. The 57,500 barrels extracted in 2008 from the dozens of non-golf holes on the courses is valued around $4 million.

3. Beverly Hills Oil Field
Beverly Hills is a major oil field, trending east-west, from Century City to the Miracle Mile. It was discovered in 1900, and since then has produced 150 million barrels of oil. It is topped by some of the most valuable real estate in the city, and is accessed through three unusual well sites. One has a visible drilling tower covered with a floral pattern, next to Beverly Hills High School; another, on Doheny, has a camouflaged moveable building concealing the rig; and at the third location, at Pico and Genessee, the entire well site is surrounded by 100 foot tall walls, designed to look like a 7-story office building. Together these sites have around 90 operating wells, producing more than 850,000 barrels per year.

4. San Vicente Oil Field
Despite being a small field, with no active wells above it, San Vicente manages to produce nearly 400,000 barrels of crude a year. The oil is extracted from this field through diagonal wells that come to the surface next to the Beverly Center, in PXP's well and production area.

5. Salt Lake Oil Field
The Salt Lake Field underlies the city from Beverly Hills to the Wilshire District, an area that includes Cedars Sinai Hospital, LACMA, Park La Brea, Farmers Market, and the Grove. It is one of the most famous and historic of LA's oil fields, as its visible surface seeps, such as those at the La Brea Tar Pits, led to its early development, in 1903. At its production peak in 1908, it produced 4.5 million barrels of oil. Its output is now small (just over 50,000 barrels per year), and instead of being covered in hundreds of derricks, is accessed nearly invisibly through a multiple, directional well location, behind a fence, on the west side of the Beverly Center mall.

6. South Salt Lake Oil Field
This is a small field south of the Salt Lake Field, with no active wells on top of it. Its output of 31,600 barrels in 2008 was extracted by directional wells from PXP's Packard well site, which is atop the Beverly Hills Oil Field.

7. Las Cienegas Oil Field
The Las Cienegas Field is long and narrow, spanning from La Brea to downtown Los Angeles. It is accessed through four well sites, behind fences. Three are operated by PXP, and one by the St. James Oil Company. A fifth, at Pico and Longwood, has been removed from service. The field produces a substantial half a million barrels per year.

8. Los Angeles City Oil Field
The Los Angeles City field is the first field to be discovered in the city. It underlies the area on the north side of downtown, and between Vermont and Dodger Stadium. Hundreds of wells have been drilled throughout this area, starting with Doheny's first successful well in 1892, located near today's Glendale Blvd. and Second St. The field is almost entirely shut down (1,000 barrels were extracted in 2008). The field's legacy continues in the form of clean up of old well sites, and the management of methane seeping from the ground, an issue made infamous with the Roybal/Belmont school project, located on the southern edge of the field.

9. Los Angeles Downtown Oil Field
The Los Angeles Downtown field is small field underneath the Staples Center and Convention Center area. It is accessed through a well site on Hill Street, operated by the St. James Oil Company. It produces around 35,000 barrels per year.

10. Union Station Oil Field
The St. James Oil Corporation operated several wells in this small field, but all the wells were plugged and capped by 2006.