

## **Green River Oil Spill Barely Averts Disaster to Colorado River Water Supply**

### **Toxic Oil Stream Nearly Reaches Spawning Endangered Fish**

Another Utah oil spill occurred on or before May 21 within 2.6 miles of the Green River nearly polluting the river, which provides 40 percent of the Colorado River's flows at Lake Powell. The oil spill is the 3rd to occur in the last 3 months amid Utah's oil and gas boom that is increasingly threatening the watersheds that provide water to millions of downstream residents.

The total quantity of oil spilled near the Green River is still unknown, although the BLM indicated the leaking well gushed 80 to 100 barrels of oil per hour, according to a Salt Lake Tribune story. The Green River spill ran into a dry wash nearby, which feeds the Green River — critical habitat for four endangered fish species.

The toxic flood ran down the wash toward the river before it was stopped by cleanup crews just upstream of the Green River. Endangered razorback suckers are currently spawning at the confluence of the San Rafael and Green Rivers, downstream of where the oil spill nearly met the river. Their recently-hatched larvae remain suspended in river currents until they reach critical nursery habitat downstream and are vulnerable to impacts like contamination from toxic chemicals.

**"Utahns are sick of these spills. We've had 3 oil spills in 3 months and mounting evidence that Utah is unprepared to manage the pollution boom caused by Utah's rush to approve new oil and gas wells"** said Zach Frankel, Executive Director of the Utah Rivers Council.

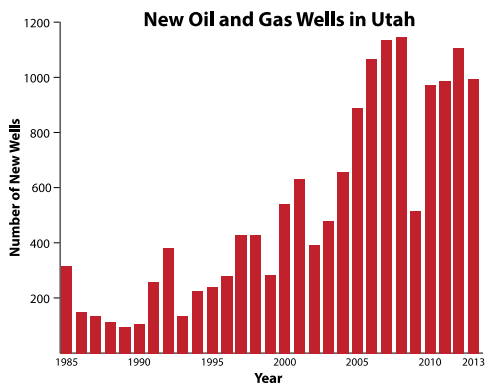
**"These kinds of recurring events clearly show this industry cannot be trusted,"** said Tim Wagner with the Sierra Club. **"And it's also indicative of what our future holds for us as long as we have a Governor who thinks that dirty energy is Utah's future."**

The State of Utah has seen an explosion in oil and gas development over the last 10 years that has led to a similar rise in accidents and spills according to various sources. In addition to the Green River spill, two spills occurred in March in another tributary watershed of the Colorado River, the Little Valley Wash of the Escalante River. Other major Utah spills include two large events on Red Butte Creek, another in Parley's Creek and another in Willard Bay.

Utah's recruitment of new energy development has led the state to become 11th in the U.S. for crude oil production and 10th in natural gas output, according to the Division of Oil, Gas and Mining. The growth shows no sign of abatement as thousands of proposed new wells await approval alongside a cavalcade of tar sands and oil shale projects that threaten Utah's watersheds and the water supply for millions of western residents.

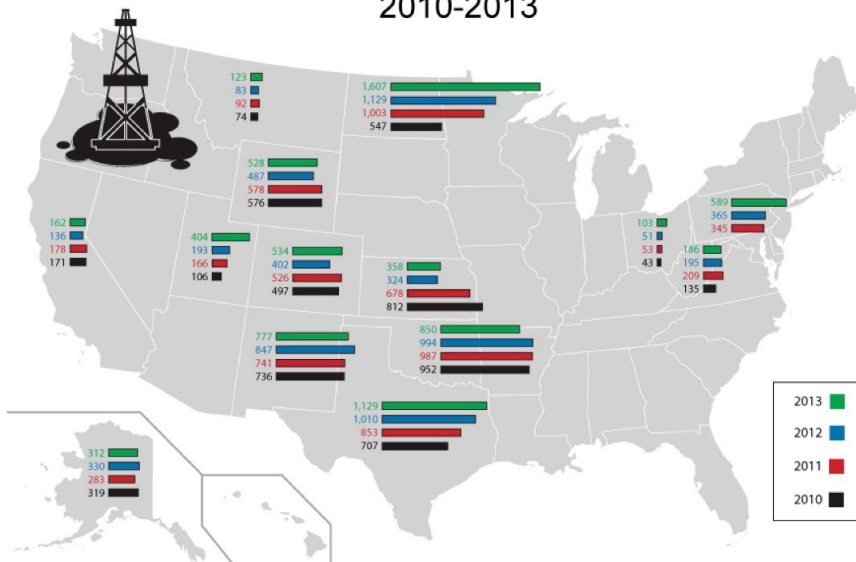
**"Anyone who depends upon the Colorado River should look upstream to Utah because it's only a matter of time before one of these spills contaminates their water supply. Its not if, but when."** said John Weisheit, Conservation Director of Living Rivers and the Colorado Riverkeeper.

Headwater lands like those in Utah provide the majority of flows for the Colorado River water supply tapped by residents in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Tuscon and Phoenix among other cities. More oil spills are likely in the future, based on data sources tracking incidents over the last several years. A comparison of approvals of oil and gas wells with incident reports of spills and accidents indicates Utah is likely to see more spills as thousands of new oil and gas wells are approved.



State and federal data indicates reported spills from oil and gas well sites were up 17 percent last year— this can be seen in the following graphic published by E&E News on May 12, 2014

## Selected Oil Spills by State 2010-2013



Earlier this month, congressional investigators from the Government Accountability Office released a report detailing the BLM's failure to inspect thousands of oil and gas wells considered potentially at high risk for water contamination and other environmental impacts. The report emphasized the agency's lack of oversight and ineffective coordination with state regulators in Utah and several other states, according to an AP story.

For More Information Contact 801-699-1856 Utah Rivers Council

or 801-467-9294 Sierra Club

or 435-259-1063 Living Rivers

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