Peak oil needs to be investigated along with alternatives

by Randy Bright http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=4823

When I was a teenager, my father contemplated buying a particular piece of land with the intention of drilling for oil. Since he had worked in the oil business for many years, he knew that he could either become very wealthy or go broke, depending on whether he struck oil or not. In the end, he decided not to take the chance, and not long after someone else bought the property and sunk a well. It was a gusher.

I find the environmental movement to be something of an enigma. On one hand, I believe that the majority of believers in global warming and smart growth are people who sincerely care about the environment, but on the other hand I'm convinced that the environmental movement has far more to do with money and politics than with the environment. Nothing represents that dichotomy of thought quite as much as the theory of peak oil.

According to the Wikipedia, peak oil is defined as "the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline."

Peak oil does not mean depletion of oil, but the time at which the amount of oil extraction begins to fall, which theoretically leads to depletion. Since the world population is growing, and with it, the demand for more and more oil, peak oil is seen as a threat to civilization itself.
Some experts say that global peak oil will begin around the year 2020, but the International Energy Agency says that it began in 2006.

The problem with the theory is that we keep finding more gas and oil, and the reserves that we thought were not recoverable are becoming so with new and better methods for extraction.
A very recent Reuters article claimed that oil and gas reserves have increased at record rates over the past year. The proven reserves of gas increased 11 percent, bringing the total gas reserves in the United State to 284 trillion cubic feet. Oil reserves rose 9 percent to 22.3 billion barrels. Reserves in Texas and North Dakota alone rose by 529 million barrels and 481 million barrels, respectively.

There are abundant reserves of gas and oil in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Pennsylvania and Alaska - as well as many other states. Beyond the more well-known oil producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries, there are also abundant reserves in Brazil and Russia, and recently massive discoveries have even been found in Israel.

The theory of peak oil assumes that oil is a finite resource, because it is a product of decaying plant and animal materials. However, some scientists believe that it is actually a naturally generated product from deep within the earth, and that oil fields that were previously assumed to be empty could eventually be replenished. This theory is called the "abiotic theory of the origin of oil."

Peak oil also assumes that we are not capable of extracting all of the oil because of its location and the lack of technology for extracting it from subterranean formations. But again, oil companies continue to develop new methods and technologies that can pull out gas and oil from depths and formations that were previously thought to be impossible to achieve.

The abundance of gas and oil in the United States and its allies mean that the time when peak oil might occur is probably much further away than proponents of the peak oil theory would like to admit. And if oil is abiotic in origin instead of from fossils, it could mean that we might never run out.

The problems, of course, are the environmentalists and the politicians. They want oil and gas shortages to drive prices up and to drive driving automobiles down, all to reduce the amount of oil needed and to reduce pollution. Perhaps U.S. reserves are being protected for future use, or to pay off our debts to the Chinese. Regardless the reason, standing in their way are millions of Americans like myself that don't believe in peak oil or global warming, and find it perplexing when other countries are near our shores pumping oil, while our government doesn't permit our producers to explore the same areas because of the risk of environmental damages.

That doesn't mean that all of us conservatives want to continue to burn oil and gas forever. I, like the others, believe that we need to be developing alternate energy sources that are safe, abundant, and inexpensive to use. We just don't believe that we are ready to make a drastic change to technologies that are great in theory but as yet unproven in use, especially when it will reduce one of the most important factors needed for economic development and the survival of civilizations - individual mobility.

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This entry was posted on Thursday, December 9th, 2010 and is filed under Columns.