

09/26/2015

Dear Governor Haley,

This was sent to me by
a British neighbor here at
North Litchfield Beach, SC — who
suggested that I send it on
to you.

I suppose that any governor
of a coastal state could find
this a worthwhile read.

Thank you for all you do for
South Carolina.

Sincerely,

Hazel S. Puyet

155 Windover Dr.

Pawleys Island, SC 29585

P-1



THE RESOURCE CURSE

THIS IS NOT PLAINS ALL AMERICAN Pipeline's first big mishap. The company operates 17,800 miles of pipe and gathering systems across the country. Between 2004 and 2007 the Environmental Protection Agency ordered Plains to pay \$3.25 million in reparations and spend \$41 million updating pipelines after 10 spills dumped a combined 273,420 gallons of oil in waterways in Texas, Kansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. Its Canadian division suffered three major accidents in Alberta between 2006 and 2012. And last May a ruptured Plains pipeline in Los Angeles County sent 19,000 gallons of crude through the streets of the city's Atwater Village neighborhood. Overall, since 2006 Plains has racked up 175 safety and maintenance infractions, many due to pipe corrosion. The Santa Barbara pipeline wall had eroded to an estimated 1/16th of an inch thick when it broke. According to a *Los Angeles Times* analysis, the company's incident rate per mile of pipe is more than triple the national average; among the more than 1,700 pipeline operators listed in a federal database, only four were cited for more infractions.

Line 901 is a 10-mile-long, 24-inch-wide pipe that moves crude from ExxonMobil's Los Flores Processing Facility to a pumping station up the Gaviota Coast; from there the oil goes to refineries. When 901 ruptured it was carrying 1,300 barrels an hour, well below its maximum capacity of 2,000. A company spokesperson said at a press conference that the pipeline had experienced some "pressure anomalies" the morning

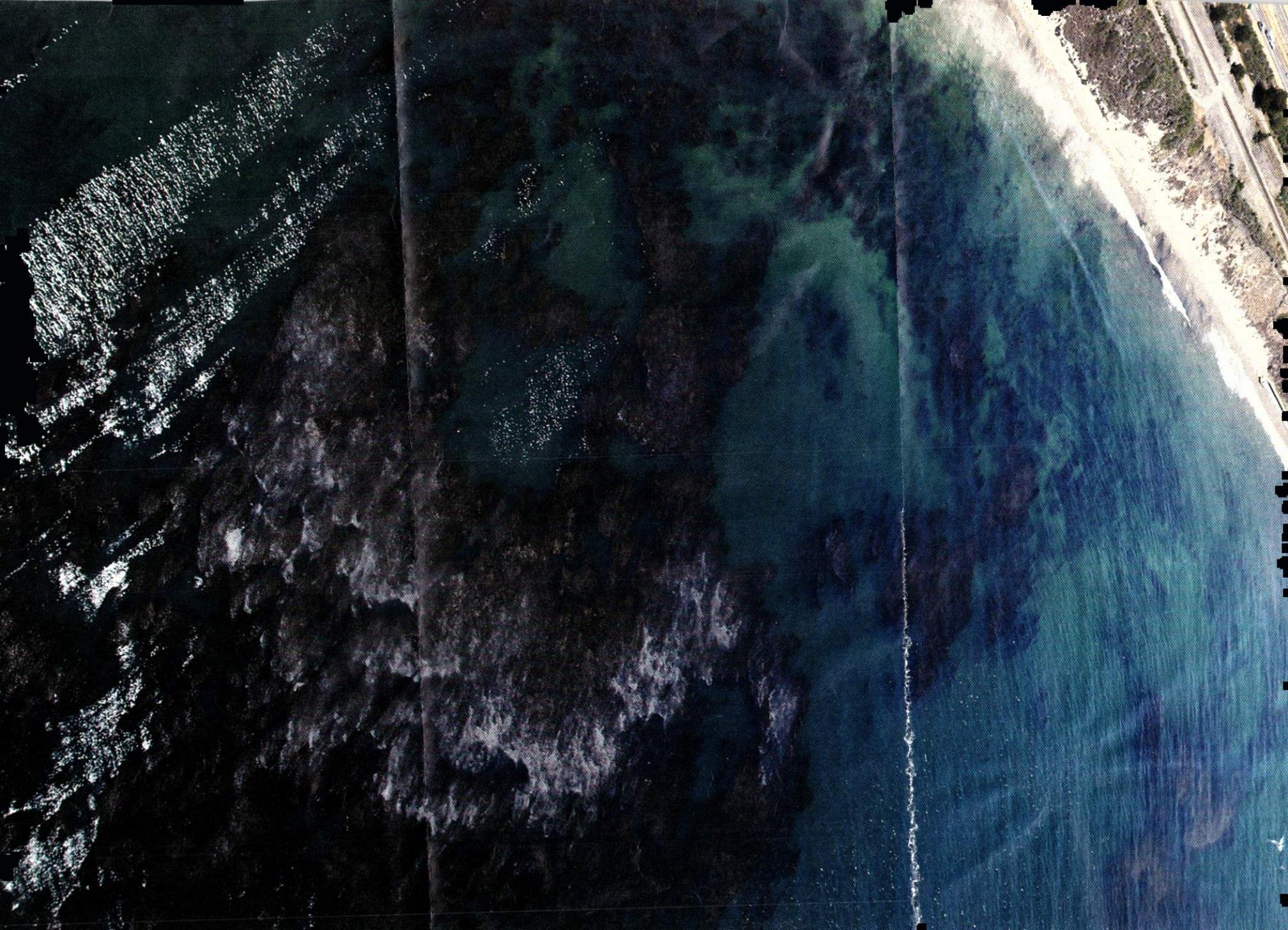
of May 19 and was shut off at 11:30 a.m. Plains employees located the breach at 1:30 p.m.; the company didn't report the incident to the Coast Guard's National Response Center until 2:56 p.m.—right around the time the Coast Guard announced that the leak had been stopped (the discrepancy between the shutoff time and when oil finally stopped seeping out of the pipe hasn't been explained). A spokesperson assured Audubon that Plains had initiated emergency procedures, as required under state and federal permits, but declined to provide details.

During this timeframe, independent of the company's response, county firefighters were already battling the spill. At 11:42 a.m. a resident had dialed 911 to report the strong smell of gas. Fortunately, an oil spill emergency drill was taking place less than two miles away when the call came in. Firefighters were reassigned to walk the beach, where they found the sticky mess oozing into tide pools and hastily built a berm to stem outflow into the ocean.

One thing is certain: The pipeline wasn't shut down as swiftly as modern technology allows. In the wake of the incident it emerged—much to the surprise of virtually everyone outside of Plains itself—that the pipeline was the only one in Santa Barbara not under the county's jurisdiction, and thus the only one *not* fitted with an automatic shutoff system to detect pinhole seeps and minute changes in pressure. That's because when 901 was built in 1987, its owner successfully challenged the county in court, arguing that the pipeline was an interstate project and should



SEARCH AND RESCUE
Mike Harris, of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, expertly nets an oil-coated Brown Pelican, one of dozens of birds rescued. It can take up to 300 gallons of water to clean a single pelican, and most birds require a week to recover.





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and helicopters soared overhead. Skimmer boats deploying inflatable booms gathered on the horizon. Nearly 10 miles of coastline normally packed with Memorial Day weekend visitors was soon evacuated and closed—not only to sunbathers but to would-be volunteers, area biologists, and the media. Governor Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency. Information became tightly controlled.

Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Santa Barbara-based Environmental Defense Center, described the emergency response as surprisingly slow and decidedly “bizarre.” She wondered why more wasn’t done during the first 36 hours, when the winds were calmer. Such concerns have been echoed by others, from local residents to elected leaders. “I would love personally to have a timeline,” Santa Barbara County Supervisor Peter Adam told federal authorities at a special meeting of the county board of supervisors. The Ocean Conservancy’s Greg Helms wondered about all the “secrecy” around the accident and the cleanup response.

The feds say they’ve been forthright from the start, that it took time to create a plan, coordinate manpower, and pinpoint sensitive Chumash archaeological sites. “It seems like a delay, but it’s necessary,” U.S. Coast Guard Captain Jennifer Williams told Santa Barbara officials. In the days following the spill, more than 1,400 professional responders from around the country descended on Santa Barbara under the joint Coast Guard–EPA plan. Local personnel were

kept behind yellow tape for nearly a week.

While locals are furious about the response, elected leaders are calling for answers about the cause. U.S. Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, as well as Congresswoman Lois Capps, have criticized Plains for its lack of transparency and demanded a full account of the incident from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. This relatively unknown federal agency is charged with policing more than 2.6 million miles of U.S. pipes, but it has long been underfunded and understaffed. Meanwhile, the county district attorney’s office and state attorney general are investigating the incident as a possible criminal matter. Perhaps more will be known when California’s Congressional delegation gets the report they demanded, though there’s been no word on when it might be released.

BY THE TIME AUDUBON WENT TO PRESS two weeks after the spill, 18 boats had removed 11,600 gallons of oily water from the ocean. Teams continued to comb more than 40 miles of affected shoreline, hauling out 4,000 cubic yards of oiled vegetation, sand, and dirt. UC-Santa Barbara scientists reported thousands of “floating tar pancakes” bobbing throughout the channel, and tar balls were washing ashore as far away as Los Angeles.

Most of the dying is happening below the surface. Waves churn the fugitive oil—a particularly heavy and sticky type of crude—and

NOWHERE TO RUN
A Western Snowy Plover on the beach at the Coal Oil Point Reserve in Isla Vista, California, which has been plagued by tar balls. Some 40 pairs of the federally threatened birds breed here.



therefore fall under (weaker) federal regulations. (Plains inherited the exemption when it bought the pipeline in 1998.) So when the leak was discovered, the pipeline had to be shut down remotely by a Plains operator in Texas.

Installing a single automatic shutoff valve on a pipeline like 901 can cost as much as \$1.5 million. In SEC filings, Plains reported \$43 billion in revenues and \$878 million in profits last year. CEO Greg L. Armstrong got \$4.3 million in total compensation last year, and he's guaranteed \$87 million in severance if he's terminated—with or without cause. "On behalf of Plains," he said in a statement, "please know that we deeply regret that this incident occurred, and we are truly sorry for the resulting impact to the environment and wildlife, as well as for any disruption and inconvenience caused to area residents and visitors."

Among the more than 1,700 pipeline operators listed in a federal database, only four were cited for more infractions than Plains All American Pipeline.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE SHUTDOWN wasn't the only element in this disaster that seems to have unfolded at a less-than-optimal pace. Deane Plaister, who sits on a local environmental outfit's executive committee, remembers standing alone on a crude-covered stretch of sand nearly 20 hours after the leak

was detected, asking himself, "Where the hell is everyone?" It was around 7 a.m. on Wednesday, and cleanup teams were nowhere in sight.

Plaister and a dozen other locals, clad in little more than swimsuits and T-shirts, took it upon themselves to try to tackle the Sisyphean task of shoveling load after load of oil into five-gallon buckets even as the waves lapped more tar ashore. Every so often they'd rush into the surf to scoop the gluey body of a dying pelican into their arms. Meanwhile, they were being told they risked arrest if they continued to violate police orders to vacate the area, that they had to leave the cleanup to the professionals. Angry, exhausted, and overmatched by the sheer scale of the mess, the citizen bucket brigade nevertheless carried on into the evening.

Filmmaker Osiris Castañeda recalled how, as he heaved buckets weighed down with 50 pounds of the black goop, a truckload of uniformed Caltrans workers stood idle and refused to help with a task outside their job description. "There's a system here that's broken," he said, "just like that pipeline is broken." Kayak guide Tamlorn Chase told of three Western Snowy Plovers chirping in alarm as they avoided the oil covering their feeding ground. "I've never heard them make that sound before," he said.

As the vigilante remediation crew toiled, about a mile up the coast, just past Refugio State Beach, where the pipeline ruptured, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Environmental Protection Agency were beginning to power up their orchestrated cleanup effort. Planes



BUCKET BRIGADE

Before official cleanup crews descended on petroleum-soaked beaches, local residents scooped up thousands of gallons of crude along the coast of Refugio State Beach in Goleta, California.



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GULF COAST

THE BIRDS OF BRITISH PETROLEUM

Five years after the largest marine oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry, the author of "The Tarball Chronicles" grabs his binoculars and returns to the scene of the slime.

By David Gessner Photography by Joel Sartore



PELICAN BRIEF

An oiled Brown Pelican rests after being cleaned at the Fort Jackson Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Buras, Louisiana, during the 2010 BP spill. Pelicans that recovered were released at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas.

send it swirling along the Gaviota Coast's intertidal zones. The technology doesn't yet exist to capture oil that has sunk into the water column.

As the crude gloms onto sand and other minerals suspended in the water, it sinks to the seafloor, where it skitters along until it lodges in a low spot on the sandy bottom or in the nooks and crannies of a nearby reef. The toxic material is raining down on the skin and shells of sea anemones and other invertebrates, and working its way through the plankton that nourish tiny filter feeders all the way up to Cassin's Auklets and endangered blue whales.

The insidious oil is also clouding waters, robbing kelp of sun. The marine vegetation along the narrow strip where land meets ocean provides a three-dimensional playpen and hunting ground for seals chasing prey, and shelters a treasure trove of urchins, lobsters, crabs, sponges, anemones, and coral. Once the reef goes, so do the animals, said Ben Halpern, a UC-Santa Barbara marine scientist. "We'll be feeling the effects in this spot for many years to come."

Many effects are already disturbingly apparent. In early June oil was still strangling gulls and grebes, and unwitting pelicans were

Large, gooey chunks of tar were tangled in the wrack where Western Snowy Plovers were pecking for sand fleas and small crustaceans. Their nests sat just feet away.

diving headfirst into floating slicks. Farther inland, an oiled duck was rescued in a city park when passersby saw it desperately trying to clean its tainted wings. While numerous avian species suffered exposure, bird conservationists are keeping particularly close watch on a shorebird whose numbers have dramatically declined in recent years: the Western Snowy Plover.

Six days after the spill, Pat Walker, a member of the volunteer Snowy Plover Docent Program, trained her binoculars on the beach of Coal Oil Point Reserve, about 14 miles down the coast from the rupture. Large, gooey chunks of tar were tangled in the wrack where Western Snowy Plovers were pecking for sand fleas and small crustaceans. Their nests sat just feet away.

Walker didn't see any oiled birds, but she knew they were out there. A fellow docent had spotted a few the previous day, and reports would soon follow of five with oiled feet, beaks, or feathers. Even a small amount of oil can sicken the birds if they ingest it while preening or feeding among the kelp.

Inconspicuous, sometimes pugnacious, and

standing just a few inches tall, the Western Snowy Plover has been listed as a federally threatened species since 1993. The tiny shorebird has only 15 major breeding sites along the West Coast, down from 50 in 1970; their numbers oscillate between 500 and 1,500 in the state. About 40 pairs nest in front of low-lying dunes at Coal Oil Point Reserve.

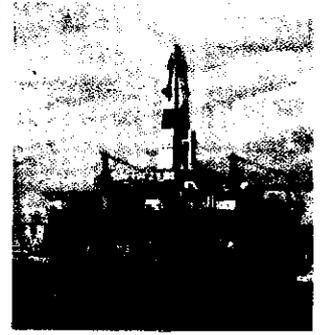
For nearly two decades the reserve's director, Cristina Sandoval, and her volunteers have watched over this population, maintaining a fence around the nesting site and delivering gentle but stern reminders to walkers, joggers, and UC-Santa Barbara students to respect it. Endangered Least Terns also inhabit this mile-long stretch, and rare beetles and spiders live among the dunes.

Sandoval was grateful to the small cleanup crew that spent days clearing oil on the reserve but lamented the costs of oil dependency. "It's inevitable," she said of spills in Santa Barbara, with its rich reserves and hungry drillers. "Are we okay with a big spill every 50 years?" Conservationists are wary of looming energy projects proposed a few miles from the site. Venoco, for instance, wants to expand offshore drilling at Platform Holly, and Sunset Exploration, partnered with ExxonMobil, wants to begin slant drilling from Vandenberg Air Force Base to the Tanquillion Ridge reserve.

"My first reaction was, 'Here we go again,'" Andrea Jones, director of bird conservation for Audubon California, said of the spill. As heartbreaking as she found the accident and its aftermath, Jones was encouraged by California legislation proposed June 2 that would grant stricter state oversight of pipelines like the one operated by Plains. California Senate Bill 414 would mandate more frequent inspections, additional on-call responders, and automatic shutoff valves along pipes in environmentally sensitive areas. The National Audubon Society and Audubon California have also thrown their support behind California Senate Bill 788, which would close a loophole in the Coastal Sanctuary Act that currently allows the State Lands Commission to grant new leases for offshore oil and gas development.

Such legislative efforts won't undo the wreckage wrought by this spill, or unravel the nagging questions about the accident and cleanup process, but they could help prevent such fiascos in the future. In the meantime, pipes will burst, equipment will fail, and people will make mistakes. Until laws are toughened, energy companies are held more accountable, and the country starts moving—with speed and conviction—toward a more sustainable energy future, these spills will surely happen, again, and again, and again. ■

Tyler Hayden is the news editor of the Santa Barbara Independent.



NORTHERN EXPOSURE WITH ROYAL DUTCH SHELL AND OTHER DRILLERS PUSHING INTO THE ARCTIC, THE SCALE OF POTENTIAL DISASTERS BECOMES MIND-BOGGLING.

The earth bleeds black—and fast. And the spill in Santa Barbara, as well as many before it, prove that humans can't keep up. If it took an entire day for authorities to respond to the leak at Santa Barbara *on land*, how much time will it take to control one 70 miles offshore in, say, the Chukchi Sea off northwestern Alaska? That's where Shell will begin drilling this summer, thanks to the Obama administration, which blessed the lease despite the company's many misadventures in the region—including a 514-foot drill ship that caught fire in 2012. The National Audubon Society and 11 other conservation groups are currently fighting the lease in federal district court in Alaska.

President Obama says that offshore drilling is inevitable, and that energy companies that get access to the northern seas will be held to the highest standards. But even the Department of the Interior's recent review stated that there is a 75 percent chance that Shell's work in Arctic waters will result in one or more oil spills. If the standards match the expectations, then we can count on more destruction that's even harder to contain.—Purbita Saha