

# Lea tops million barrels oil per day

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Keeping the No. 1 spot among the nation's counties, Lea County hit the record books again, logging almost 32 million barrels of crude oil in October.

That's a little more than a million barrels a day.

With a lion's share of county revenue coming from the oil and gas industry, County Finance Director Chip Low tracks the data.

"As far as I can tell, Lea and Eddy (counties) are the top two oil and gas producing counties," Low told the News-Sun. "Midland, Texas, is at only 17 million in October."

After adjustments to data reported in October, Low found that Lea County actually topped 30 million for the first time in September at 30,016,695.

"We won't know November production until the end of January. It's a two-month lag," Low said. "Eddy County has record production and Lea County has record production."

Through various taxes, leases, fees and royalties, the oil and gas industry supports coffers of governmental entities throughout the state, with estimates at more than a third of New Mexico's budget revenue.

Lea County Commission Chairman Dean Jackson, lauding the oilfield workers, borrowed from a previous comment attributed to the finance director.

"I'll steal Chip's line, 'It's a great time to live in Lea County.' What else can we say?" Jackson said. "We are very, very blessed. We have the best hard working people right here in Lea County. All they want to do is work and make money and that's the American way."

Asked about the county commission plans for the coming year, Jackson concluded, "Just try to keep our share of the money and do things for the people of Lea County, such as infrastructure and quality of life issues. The hardest part is finding construction workers and engineers. Everybody's busy." Whether the production levels continue to rise may depend a lot on legislators and their constituents.

With an eye to the upcoming legislative sessions in both Texas and New Mexico, Permian Basin Petroleum Association President Ben Shepperd wrote in the current issue of the organization's magazine, "As lawmakers double down on efforts to increase environmental measures, we can expect to see unprecedented efforts to utilize the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, and new financial or securities regulations to impede domestic production." Shepperd noted the result would be world demand met by unfriendly nations instead of U.S. producers.

"At present we expect bills in New Mexico that will create new causes of action for environmental lawsuits and other efforts that take square aim at the oil and gas producers that account for a huge portion of the New Mexico economy and state budget," Shepperd wrote.

State Rep. Larry Scott, R-Hobbs, co-owner of Lynx Petroleum LLC, agreed concerning the New Mexico legislators.

"Despite record production, the state regulatory environment continues to try to put roadblocks in front of the industry to inhibit activity levels. I think that's a real shame," Scott told the News-Sun.

To develop a comparison, Low started with production figures from November 2014 when he began keeping track of the data.

Lea County's oil production increased 534 percent from 5,031,012 barrels in November 2014 to 31,905,347 barrels in October 2022. During the same

period, Eddy County's oil production increased 282 percent from 5,493,995 to 20,968,082 barrels.

Natural gas production in Lea County also saw a hefty increase of 514 percent during the same time period from 16,614,973 million cubic feet (mcf) to 101,969,914 mcf. In Eddy County, which historically produces more natural gas than Lea County, the increase was 404 percent from 24,114,320 mcf to 121,562,244 mcf.