

Foundation goal is to Respect Big Bend Country

MIDLAND - The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation will offer a press briefing next Thursday, May 2, at 10:30 am in advance of George Mitchell being honored posthumously that evening by the Petroleum Museum.

Marilu Hastings, a Midland native, member of the National Petroleum Council at the Department of Energy, and the vice president of the foundation's sustainability program will host the briefing.

To honor the 100th anniversary of Mr. Mitchell's birth, May 21, Texas A&M Press will publish this fall, "*George P. Mitchell: Fracking, Sustainability, and an Unorthodox Quest to Save the Planet*," by Loren Steffy, author, journalist, and *The Houston Chronicle's* former business columnist.

The *Economist's* obituary headline of Mr. Mitchell read: "Few businesspeople have done as much to change the world as George Mitchell."

More about Mr. Mitchell at www.georgemitchell.com.

The briefing next week is of particular importance to those who live and love this end of Texas - an area the Mitchells have fought to protect through their foundation.

Energy development and resulting energy sprawl in Far West Texas is accelerating at an astonishing rate. The Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas at Austin calls West Texas the most energy intensive region

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of the United States, if not the world.

More specifically, the United States Geological Survey reports the region has "technically recoverable resources" of more than 45 billion barrels of oil and 281 trillion cubic feet of gas—enough to meet nearly six years of total American demand.

As a state, Texas also has greater wind generating capacity than all other wind producing states combined. Substantial utility-scale solar energy capacity is being built as well. For example, The Electric Reliability Council of Texas expects Pecos County alone to increase solar energy capacity by 12,000 megawatts, equal to about 50 percent of Texas's total wind capacity.

And, while all forms of energy - oil, gas, wind and solar - are central to the Texas economy, the greater Big Bend region is much more than a source of energy resources.

The area brings to mind America's mythic frontier - home to endless high desert vistas, soaring mountain ranges, and fiercely independent people whose lives intertwine with the natural landscape in ways most Americans only dream about.

Respect Big Bend Country is a public campaign and regional planning process - a collective impact model that we're confident can maximize the benefits of responsible energy development while conserving natural and cultural resources.

The effort is looking at the region as a whole, rather than individual development sites, and by doing so, striving to avoid, reduce and restore impacts on communities, land, and water.

Some of the resources at risk include:

- Limited water reserves, from life-sustaining groundwater to the Balmorhea pool

- The most biologically diverse desert in the western hemisphere

- One-of-a-kind, awe-inspiring Texas landscapes, sunsets, and dark skies at the McDonald Observatory

- One hundred forty years of ranching heritage, with some of the largest historic working ranches remaining in Texas

The enemy in the greater Big Bend region is the status quo.

This community - and landowner-driven initiative - using data, science, experience, and common sense - will affect change, and help conserve resources while encouraging the energy industry to employ responsible practices in their development projects.

The Mitchell Foundation, or CGMF, began the effort in 2017 by conducting a series of focus groups in Alpine, Fort Davis and Pecos/Balmorhea, listening to the region's landowners, residents, and community leaders. Their voices have informed the initiative's mission, strategy and path forward.

CGMF then invited a diverse, knowledgeable working group of professionals made up of private landowners, former policymakers, university researchers, energy industry leaders, community stakeholders, and environmental scientists to provide their perspectives on the challenges and solutions of meeting energy needs with conservation and community protection goals.