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SHALE: Haynesville play still has lots of gas to give -- study

Nathanial Gronewold, E&E reporter
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A rich shale gas reservoir straddling Texas and Louisiana has decades of life left in it, though production from the field may have already reached its peak potential.

Yesterday, researchers from the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas published an overview of a study on the Haynesville Shale. One of the largest shale gas fields in the southern United States, the Haynesville was the site of bustling drilling activity before gas prices plunged on oversupply.

Despite a relative dearth of drilling activity in the Haynesville today, "the play remains promising under the right economic conditions," the study says.

BEG researchers believe that as gas prices rise, the field will likely draw strong interest from oil and gas companies again, and production of gas from the Haynesville may continue all the way out to 2065.

But BEG's researchers also think shale gas production from the field probably already peaked at 6 billion cubic feet (bcf) per day 2012, dropping since to approximately 4 bcf per day on average this year as interest in developing the Haynesville has waned. They believe with Henry Hub benchmark gas prices at around \$4 per million British thermal units (Btu), gas out from horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing could quickly rise back to 5 bcf per day sometime in the early 2020s and steadily decline afterward.

All told, a total of some 46 trillion cubic feet of gas could be yielded from the Haynesville this century.

BEG researchers have conducted similar geologic and economic reviews of the Barnett and Fayetteville shale gas zones, are in the midst of studying the Marcellus, and will eventually focus more closely on shale oil zones.

In a phone interview, BEG Director Scott Tinker said it's possible for Haynesville producers to reach or exceed the 6-bcf-per-day peak again depending on the price of natural gas, though the study conducted doesn't reach that conclusion based on the assumptions made to review the profile of the Haynesville. The report sees Haynesville total gas output falling to around 1.7 bcf per day by 2045.

The Haynesville research, like prior reviews, is the result of "an ever-improving integrated approach" with the goal of better understanding U.S. shale gas reservoirs, Tinker said.

He also noted that there is a lot more gas in the Haynesville rock than this review touches upon. Fieldwide recovery factors are frequently put at around 10 percent for shale gas fields

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assuming existing technologies. As technology changes and the economics of gas drilling changes, recovery ratios are expected to rise.

Rig operators and service companies are also fast figuring out how to get drilling and well completion costs down following the plunge in crude oil prices. Those cost savings will inevitably be reflected in shale gas drilling, as well.

"The other factor, of course, is the cost to operate the wells have come way down in the last year and a half," Tinker said. "They came down some when the price of natural gas fell starting in '09, but they didn't come down much because those drillers could move their rigs into the shale oil plays. Now that the price of oil has essentially collapsed, the operators of the rigs are saying, 'Boy, we'd sure like to have our rigs deployed anywhere,' and they're a lot less proud, so the costs are coming down."

A map of active land rig deployment published by oil field services giant Baker Hughes shows more than a dozen horizontal gas drilling rigs are actively developing the Haynesville, while just two are deployed in the Barnett Shale. Tinker said the disparity might be explained by the relative age of operations in the two fields. Drillers opened up the Barnett earlier, and the most lucrative and productive spots have been taken.

Though deep and under high pressure, the Haynesville still has available "sweet spots" that some companies will manage to pull profit from even with the low natural gas prices, he explained.

The Haynesville field is roughly shared evenly between northeastern Texas and northwestern Louisiana.

BEG's study was published in *Oil & Gas Journal*.

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