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by **WADE GOODWYN**

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All Things Considered

3 min 36 sec



David Kent/MCT/Landov/Fort Worth Star Telegram

There are few things in life more joyful than discovering a giant oil or natural gas field in Texas. You're suddenly rich beyond your wildest dreams. When the scope and size of the natural gas reservoir in the Barnett Shale in North Texas first became apparent, there were predictions that the find would last 100 years.

Well, that was over the top. But University of Texas geology professor Scott Tinker, who designed and authored a new study of the Barnett Shale, says there's still a lot of gas down there, even after a decade of drilling.

"Turns out, what we learned is that there's a lot of good rock left to drill," Tinker says. "And there's quite a bit of natural gas to be produced in the better areas of the reservoir."

Tinker and his team, who examined more than 15,000 gas wells drilled over the past 10 years, found the Barnett Shale is currently producing an astonishing 2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas every year. Tinker doesn't believe this rate will increase, but he believes the reservoir will last another 25 years.

"It probably is reaching its plateau of production, which is about 10 percent of U.S. demand," Tinker says. "So in that total production, where you've produced around 13 trillion cubic feet so far ... we still see another 25 or 30 more trillion cubic feet of gas throughout the life of that field."

Some Wells Still Coming Up Dry

With the amazing leaps in imaging technology these days, you wouldn't think thousands of wells drilled in the Barnett come up dry — like the oil wildcatters in the 1930s, '40s and '50s in East and West Texas.

But Tinker says you would be wrong.



Business

U.S. Has A Natural Gas Problem: Too Much Of It

"It is kind of like the old wildcatter days," he says. "These unconventional reservoirs are pretty new to the scene. And as the natural gas price was high not that long ago, it really pushed the edges of this field."



Energy

Focus On Fracking Diverts Attention From Horizontal Drilling

That means there are a lot of North Texas landowners driving around in brand new pickups because the energy companies leased their land — only to find out there's no gas underneath.



The Fracking Boom: Missing Answers

Town's Effort To Link Fracking And Illness Falls Short

While concerns about environmental impact have grown as fracking and natural gas production have increased, this study focused on future production of shale-produced gas, rather than environmental concerns.

'The Shale Revolution Is Real'

"It's a very thorough and impressive study," says Scott Anderson, senior policy adviser for the Environmental Defense Fund who specializes in natural gas. Anderson says the study paves the way for increased production of electricity from a commodity that, in the past, has been seen as unreliable and volatile.

"This study does take a large step toward reassuring those people who are interested in banking on gas that the shale revolution is real," Anderson says, "and that it can be expected that large quantities of gas will persist for a long time, at fairly moderate prices."

In fact, shale production has been so vigorous nationally that the price of natural gas has dropped below \$4 per million BTUs — generally considered the point at which many gas wells become profitable.

But with trillions of cubic feet of natural gas waiting to be extracted, prices aren't expected to rise unless the U.S. begins to export substantially.

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