

[Previous Story](#)[Next Story](#)*Article rank* | 13 Nov 2014 | *Albuquerque Journal* | *THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

San Miguel slaps strict regulations on drilling

Unanimous approval by county panel draws oil, gas industry criticism

LAS VEGAS, N.M. — As a federal judge considers the constitutionality of one New Mexico county's efforts to ban oil and natural-gas development, commissioners in neighboring San Miguel County voted Wednesday in favor of imposing some of the strictest requirements on hydrocarbon exploration in the country.

The unanimous decision came during the commission's regular meeting. Several dozen people were in attendance.

The new ordinance supersedes a moratorium on oil and gas development that had been in place since 2010. Now, exploration and drilling will be restricted to a sparsely populated stretch on the eastern side of San Miguel County, about 60 miles from the county seat of Las Vegas.

Drilling companies will have to pay steep application fees, pay for pre-drilling assessments and post bonds, among numerous other things.

County officials say the requirements are aimed at protecting the health, safety and environmental welfare of residents. Critics say the ordinance will discourage development and ultimately hurt private mineral-rights owners in the region.

While both San Miguel and Mora counties are far from the epicenters of New Mexico's oil and gas hot spots, the industry is concerned the wave of antidevelopment sentiment could stem future opportunities.

"It's not your grandfather's oil and gas business, thanks to improvements in technology and understanding," said Steve Henke, president of the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association. "We've got a good message, both environmentally and economically, and we would just like the opportunity to demonstrate that and not have the door closed on us."

Nearly one-third of New Mexico's general funds come from taxes and royalties paid by oil and gas companies. In southeastern New Mexico — which includes part of the Permian Basin, one of the country's most prolific drilling spots — schools are bursting, housing is difficult to come by, jobs are plenty and roads are packed with oil-field trucks thanks to the latest boom.

Henke pointed to the economic windfall in Carlsbad, Hobbs and Artesia. "If you contrast the health and the vibrancy of this area with what I call the stagnation of north-central New Mexico — Las Vegas and Mora — it's stark," he said.

But some residents and elected officials in the two northern New Mexico counties say they're unwilling to trade jobs and revenue for potential effects on the region's already scarce water supplies.

The case against Mora County's oil and gas ban is pending in federal court.

This article was shared by a user of PressReader - an online source of publications from around the world. PressReader contains copyrighted material, trademarks and other proprietary information. Receipt of this article should not be interpreted as grant of any licenses express or implied, to the intellectual property of PressReader or publishers of publications presented. PressReader - Connecting People Through News PressReader, 200-13111 Vanier Place, Richmond BC V6V 2J1, Canada Phone: +1 604 278 4604 © 2003-2014 NewspaperDirect Inc. dba PressReader. All rights reserved. Terms of Use: http://www.pressdisplay.com/pressdisplay/showlink.aspx?pageid=ins_terms Privacy Policy: http://www.pressdisplay.com/pressdisplay/showlink.aspx?pageid=ins_privacy

[Previous Story](#)[Next Story](#)