

**The California Oil and Gas Report**

# Revival of Whittier Oil Field Is Focus of Lawsuit

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#### ****By Dennis Luna, J.D., P.E.****

A Los Angeles Superior Court judge may soon determine whether the City of Whittier will receive up to $100 million per year from the proposed return to production of a century-old oil field. The potential income is nearly twice the Southern California community’s $55 million annual budget.

Environmentalists and some Los Angeles County officials oppose plans by the city to allow Matrix Oil Co. of Santa Barbara to drill on seven acres of a 1,600 acre wilderness preserve in Whittier. They obtained a temporary restraining order from the Los Angeles Superior Court, halting exploratory drilling. A hearing on the case is scheduled for February 21.

A key issue is the source of the funds used to buy the land in 1994 from Chevron Oil Co. and Unocal Corporation. The money came from Los Angeles County Proposition A bonds, intended for the purchase of lands for conservation purposes.

Opponents of the planned drilling say it would violate the intent of voters in funding the wilderness preserve. Whittier officials say the city still owns the subsurface mineral rights beneath the land.

The Whittier property is part of the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preserve, which totals nearly 3,900 acres at the eastern edge of Los Angeles Country. The Preserve extends across parts of Whittier, La HabraHeights, Rowland Heights and Hacienda Heights. Much of the land was until the early 1990s an active oil field that had produced oil for more than 100 years and included approximately 500 drilled wells.

Dennis Luna is the managing partner of Luna & Glushon and is considered one of the top energy and real estate attorneys in California. Dennis is a graduate of Harvard Law School and a licensed Professional Engineer. He holds a Master of Science in Petroleum Engineering from the School of Petroleum Engineering at the University of Southern California, where he also earned a Bachelor of Science in Petroleum Engineering and a Master of Business Administration.