

Jonah, Pinedale gas fields yield oil too

By BOB MOEN

Associated Press writer

Tuesday, July 14, 2009 2:06 AM MDT

CHEYENNE -- The Jonah and Pinedale Anticline fields, well known for their enormous natural gas production, also have become Wyoming's top two oil-producing fields.

The fields in Sublette County are a major reason oil production in the state has stabilized the last few years after decades of decline.

"Those fields have buoyed up our overall total oil production," Thomas Doll, supervisor of the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, said.

Statistics from the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission show Jonah yielded 3.65 million barrels of oil in 2008 and Pinedale 3.4 million barrels.

Salt Creek, one of the state's oldest oil fields, ranked third at 3.2 million barrels thanks to the use of carbon dioxide being pumped underground to force out oil that couldn't be recovered by traditional drilling at the Natrona County site.

Wyoming produced 52.9 million barrels of oil in 2008, down from 54 million barrels in 2007. Production had been declining rapidly since 131 million barrels in 1985 before rising in 2006-07.

The Jonah and Pinedale fields also are among Wyoming's top three natural gas producers, trailing only the coal-bed methane fields in the expansive Powder River Basin.

Doll said most of the oil coming out of the Jonah and Pinedale fields is condensate -- a very light oil that can be refined into gasoline and diesel.

"Condensate is now accounting for about 25.6 percent of the total crude oil that's produced in the state of Wyoming," he said.

Bruce Hinchey, president of the Petroleum Association of Wyoming, said the condensate is easier to process into petroleum products than the typical heavy crude oil.

"And if it's a really, really thick one, they'll turn it into asphalt," Hinchey said. "This isn't like that. They can use it pretty readily."

The Powder River Basin in northeast Wyoming is the largest single field for natural gas production, but its coal-bed methane gas doesn't contain condensate, Hinchey said.