

THE
ADVOCATE

Could Louisiana's carbon capture 'gold rush' be derailed? Opposition emerges in unlikely areas.

BY DAVID J. MITCHELL | Staff writer 3 hrs ago 6 min to read



LA 442 cuts through this farm near the site of a carbon sequestration test well, as seen on Thursday, October 31, 2024 in Holden, Louisiana. An Occidental Petroleum subsidiary, 1PointFive, is proposing an underground storage hub in timberland owned by Weyerhaeuser off La. 442 west and north of the farm.

STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL JOHNSON



Louisiana's emergence as a hotbed for new technology to store carbon emissions deep underground has long been opposed by environmentalists. But pushback from an unlikely source is now also gaining momentum.

10%

Rural and conservative residents in corners of the state where oil and gas tends to be a familiar and often welcomed presence are increasingly voicing their opposition to carbon capture and sequestration projects. Industry backers, however, say the residents are being misinformed and fed scare tactics.

Fueled by lucrative federal tax credits, companies are eying southwestern and western Louisiana for big projects to store hundreds of millions of tons of carbon under tens of thousands of acres of timberland, state wildlife areas and much smaller homes and farms, state permit summaries and company materials say.

The companies include carbon capture arms of Occidental Petroleum and ExxonMobil, carbon ventures CapturePoint and Trace Carbon, natural gas pipeline company DT Midstream and Aethon Energy, permit documents say.

This "gold rush," as one legislator put it, has stirred distrust in southwest Louisiana of industry and academic promises of its safety, echoing the opposition a few years ago in Livingston Parish over a [carbon capture proposal for Lake Maurepas](#).

Residents say they have concerns over damage to underground aquifers and accidental surface leaks, fears about encroachment on their properties through pipeline expropriation and other access methods granted to companies. They have been angered that federal taxpayer dollars are behind what they view as putting a dangerous waste permanently under their feet.

Critics point to a pipeline break and leak in Satartia, Mississippi, that hospitalized at least 45 people and forced 200 to evacuate from an asphyxiating gas

20%

cloud that hung along the ground, according to an investigation by the **federal pipeline regulator**.

A pumping station that is part of the same company's network, Denbury, had a leak April 3 in Sulphur and forced a nearly two-hour shelter-in-place order for residents living within a quarter-mile, according to **state and federal reports**.

Leaving a recent town hall at the Allen Parish Civic Center on carbon capture, Kinder crawfish farmer Stewart Harrell, 42, said he's worried what a CO2 leak could do to the Chicot Aquifer, which he uses to supply his crawfish ponds.

"If it's contaminated, it ain't no good," he said.

CO2 mixed with water can form an acid that is corrosive to pipes.

"It's our drinking water, you know," added Doug Sonnier, 73, of Oberlin. "They wouldn't have put this in some big rich parish. They come out here in the woods."



More than 125 people showed up Monday, Feb. 24, 2025, for a town hall meeting at the Allen Parish Civic Center in Oberlin organized by residents opposed to carbon capture and sequestration. Several area state legislators participated in the meeting and promised to file bills this spring to restrict or even give parishes the ability to block carbon capture individually.

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Some, like Sonnier, blamed the Biden administration and Democrats, but tax credits to support CCS have been backed by successive administrations predating him. The oil and gas industry has been lobbying the second Trump administration, which has been unraveling other climate and clean energy initiatives, to keep the CCS credits in place.

Though carbon capture has been discussed for years and Louisiana proposals have gone through required public notice procedures, several residents,

like Harrell, said it seemed the push for carbon storage has been "slipped in" recently.

Sherry Coleman, 66, of Oberlin, told the town hall that carbon capture has taken root only because "no one knew anything about it."

"This cannot be a done deal. We're not the top of the heap, but we don't deserve to be the fertilizer for the rest of the heap," she said.

'I would say livid'

Several parish police juries in the region have formed their own coalition. Some of its representatives, including a leader of the movement, Allen Parish Juror Roland Hollins, have been traveling to Baton Rouge to speak in hearings and privately press their case.



Allen Parish Police Juror Roland Hollins, center, standing, speaks to more than 200 residents in crowded meeting room on the night of Monday, Jan. 13, 2025, in Oberlin about companies looking to store carbon dioxide under lands in his parish. Hollins said police jurors have little ability to halt the plans but said they want enhanced monitoring and safety protections from potential leaks. The next morning, Hollins spoke to a state legislative panel about the need for local revenue from carbon sequestration projects coming to rural Louisiana. Hollins leads a coalition of rural southwestern parishes concerned about carbon dioxide storage in their region.

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A small group of legislators representing these areas are promising bills for the legislative session beginning April 14 to rein in carbon capture and even to block it outright through local parish-by-parish votes.

Some of these legislators also supported unopposed legislation in 2020 giving the state the

ability to regulate carbon sequestration — Louisiana was granted that power by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2024 — but now say they're hearing from residents as projects have become closer to reality.

Rep. Charles Owen, R-Leesville, said his 2020 vote happened before he and his constituents understood what carbon capture would mean. He said he and his legislative colleagues had been told it was simply a measure to help the oil and gas industry.

"I just know that my citizens are very much up in arms in the two parishes I represent. I would say livid," said Owen, whose House District 30 includes central parts of Vernon and Beauregard parishes.

Owen has pre-filed the bill that would allow parish councils or police juries to decide whether to allow carbon dioxide injection wells in their parishes.

HB 4 would also give those governing authorities the ability to call a special election to allow voters to decide, as the video poker **local option elections** of 1996 did across the state. Residents could also petition parishes to call the election.

"Locals have the option of saying they don't want gambling or alcohol in this state," Owen said in an interview. "This bill that I am proposing will give the parish police or governing authorities the ability to say, 'We don't want that.'"

Other legislators who have pre-filed bills or are considering them include Rep. R. Dewith Carrier, R-Oakdale; Rep. Jason DeWitt, R-Tioga; and Rep. Rodney Schamerhorn, R-Hornbeck.

Among the proposals being discussed are an end to caps on damages from CO2 incidents that injure or kill people, an end of companies' expropriation power for CO2 pipelines and an expansion of safety distances around schools and hospitals.

Though local opponents of CCS might have common ground with environmental groups, the two are

50%

coming at it from different directions.

Environmental groups want to fight climate change and oppose extending oil and gas production.

During the town hall last week in Oberlin, however, opposition to CCS was rooted in property rights. State Rep. Danny McCormick, R-Oil City, who spent his career in the oil and gas business and has been its steady backer in the House, told residents in Oberlin he would back them.

McCormick, who represents the Ark-La-Tex corner of the state, said "you've got to get motivated. You've got to get activated. You've got to do what you're doing here tonight."

Despite the coming effort from his colleagues, Rep. Neil Riser, R-Columbia, an ardent supporter of CCS with carbon projects in his northeast corner of the state, said he believes majorities in the House and Senate remain behind the practice.

Louisiana is 'the place'

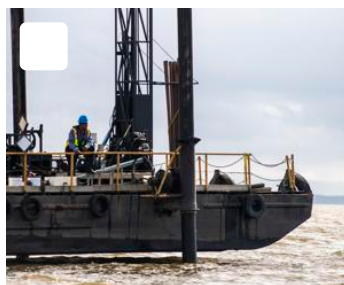
CO2 emissions lead to climate change, and carbon capture projects aim to address that problem while still allowing the oil and gas and petrochemical industries to operate.

The process sees carbon dioxide gas compressed nearly into a liquid state. It's injected thousands of feet down into formations that various geologic experts have said can hold it permanently, keeping those heat-trapping emissions out of the atmosphere.

Advocates, industry officials and these geologists point out that companies have been moving CO2 by pipeline and pumping it underground for decades to push up oil from depleted fields. They say they know how to do it safely.

60%

"CCS is a proven technology that has been successfully deployed for decades. We are confident in our ability to sequester CO2 safely and permanently in compliance with stringent regulations," said Margot Armentor, a spokeswoman for ExxonMobil.



An Air Products drilling rig used to drill the hole for the test detonation on Lake Maurepas stations for a demonstration for locals to secure a permit for a six month survey on Monday, December 5, 2022 in Akers, Louisiana.

STAFF PHOTO BY MICHAEL JOHNSON

The oil company is pursuing carbon capture in southwestern Louisiana, St. Helena Parish outside Baton Rouge and elsewhere through two carbon capture arms, including Denbury, which has a key CO2 pipeline across the state.

Several geologists have noted that Louisiana's geology, with its layers of sand and impermeable shale, provide "almost perfect" storage areas not far from the industries that need it.

"If they were going to plan a place to do CCUS (carbon capture utilization and storage), Louisiana would be the place to do it," LSU petroleum engineering professor Richard Hughes said in a video-recorded interview for TJC Group, a Baton Rouge lobbying firm that represents industrial clients.

Hughes said the state's review process and oversight should prevent problems or catch them on the small chance they develop.

Though no projects have been permitted in the state yet, critics note an EPA model storage project in Illinois leaked last year, escaping from one layer to another but not into groundwater.

70%

And opponents of CCS have raised fears of surface leaks, pointing to a catastrophic natural CO2 leak from the volcanic Lake Nyos in Cameroon that killed more than 1,700 people and thousands of cattle in the 1980s.

In an email, Hughes said the likelihood of a surface leak from deep underground is low. It would occur slowly because of the state's layered subsurface and likely be caught by regulators before it breaks through. Any leak would also happen at volumes and concentrations far below what happened in Cameroon.

"I would simply say that I lean towards the idea that a Lake Nyos type of release is extremely unlikely given our geology," Hughes said.

Published last month, an Allen Parish **risk assessment for CCS** found the highest risks of leaks would come from old oil and gas wells, monitoring wells and CO2 pipelines. The state is requiring old wells be found and sealed in CCS storage areas.

Misinformation, economic risk?

Companies with a stake in the region's CCS potential contend blocking the nascent industry would put Louisiana behind other states looking to be first.

Officials with an important lobby at the State Capitol, the Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil & Gas Association, said they will "vigorously oppose any legislation that threatens industry efforts to create jobs, produce more energy and support American energy independence."

"Louisiana's investments in CCS have played a vital role as we enter the next phase of America-first energy dominance, with major economic development projects, including the highly

80%

anticipated data center (planned for north Louisiana), expected to take advantage of Louisiana's early lead in carbon capture and storage technology," said Tommy Faucheux, LMOGA's president.

Citing a McNeese State University study, Allen Parish's risk assessment noted the financial benefits possible.

The Oxy Magnolia Sequestration Hub proposed in the parish, the assessment notes, would generate more than \$81 million in labor income from construction and operations over 12 years.

Local governments in Allen would see up to \$4.4 million in tax collections between 2026 through 2035. The figures don't include confidential landowner lease payments, the McNeese study found.

CapturePoint is looking at storage in Vernon Parish. The company plans to share millions of dollars in revenue, besides the hundreds of jobs a CO2 hub could mean over the next decade.

Company officials say they respect Owen, with whom they've met when they announced investments in local schools a year ago, for representing his constituents.

"Unfortunately, many of the things that he is hearing and saying right now are simply not accurate," said Kris Roberson, chief operating officer for CapturePoint.

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