

# Oil-for-Land Deal Fuels Unprecedented Cooperation

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*It's a win-win-win — for the Earth and its inhabitants, oil suppliers and users, and the concept of sustainable agreements.*

“Oil firm, foes strike major deal,” the headline read on a recent [Los Angeles Times article](#) by Kenneth R. Weiss. The [PXP](#) oil company will donate land and halt production off our coast early in exchange for tapping new wells while the price is high. The unprecedented deal was achieved by cooperating with Santa Barbara’s [Environmental Defense Center](#) and [GOO](#) (Get Oil Out), two of oil’s strongest local adversaries.



Karen Telleen-Lawton (Don Matsumoto photo)

My head spun as I read the article. I quickly checked the date — was it April 1? (It wasn’t.) Each paragraph was more incredible than the last — halting production, donating 200 acres of oceanview Gaviota land plus 3,700 acres of wine country for public parkland, and dismantling the oil refinery. The crux of the deal is that PXP — which purchased most parcels in the past 10 years from [Nuevo Energy Co.](#), [Chevron](#) and [Texaco](#) — will have its foes’ cooperation.

How did this happen? Steve Rusch, a PXP vice president, made concessions because they didn’t want to “simply neutralize offshore oil’s traditional opponents – they wanted to enlist their support,” Weiss wrote. Indeed, the environmental organizations’ enthusiasm could almost be heard.

Linda Krop, the Environmental Defense Center's chief counsel, said, "It's hard for me to imagine that they (county and state officials) won't approve this." For the first time in its 39-year history, GOO will support drilling. GOO's president, Abe Powell, noted the difficulty of changing from their historic stance, but they recognized the value.

Certainly, high oil prices were essential to the agreement. Light sweet crude's price has quadrupled since the county rejected a similar drilling proposal from Nuevo in 2002. These prices brought PXP back to the table. The resulting deal demonstrates not only the importance of the arduous battle to force oil companies to deal fairly, but both sides' paradigm shift in seeing their opponents as other than the enemy.

This is a sustainability story on two levels. One is the progress toward land sustainability made possible by the compromise. Land sustainability is a state of dynamic equilibrium that does not need human intervention, a goal that satisfies environmental as well as economic criteria.

Tim Ahern of the [Trust for Public Land](#) says the parcels being set aside "offer habitat for 525 plant species and more than 40 animal species that are listed as threatened or endangered." Archaeological sites dating back 9,000 years will be protected, and recreationists will benefit from the protected views, trails and beaches.

This also may be historic as a sustainable agreement, one from which several parties walk away feeling like winners. It's a win-win-win 40 years in the making. The Earth and its inhabitants benefit from land sustainability, while oil companies and users benefit from the oil supply. The third beneficiary is the concept of sustainable agreements – agreements that recognize and respect the legitimate needs of the other. I am convinced that more such agreements can be achieved in many fields.

Perhaps I'm making this a little more dramatic than it is, but it feels like a change in momentum. The 1969 oil disaster, it has long been noted, not only caused initial public outrage but was the impetus (along with [Rachel Carson's \*Silent Spring\*](#)) for the environmental movement.

This movement dominated the 1970s and became an international movement. Countries around the globe have since embraced environmental causes. In many cases, Americans have been left in the (toxic) dust, still debating whether caring for the environment might

hurt our economy. Not surprisingly, it turned out that environment care also protected the long-term economy. At last, the movement has returned home.

*Karen Telleen-Lawton's Serendipity column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. [Click here](#) to graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: The Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon.*