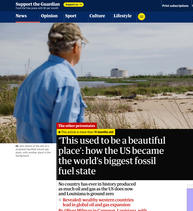

Aerial view of the oil sands in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada, which is the largest source of oil in Canada's fast-expanding economy

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The Guardian Weekly

'This used to be a beautiful place': how the US became the world's biggest fossil fuel state

No country has ever historically produced more oil and gas than the US, and Louisiana is ground zero

▷ Revealed: wealthy western countries load its global oil and gas expansion

By Oliver Milman in Cameron, Louisiana, with photography by Ed Kashi

Tuesday 12 November 2019 06.00 GMT

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Hackberry Ridge oil refinery in Cameron, Louisiana, where large amounts of pollution have been found

The rise of the US as the world's oil and gas powerhouse has come at an astonishing pace. Within just the last decade, Congress lifted a ban on domestic crude oil exports, which had been in place since the oil crisis of the 1970s, allowing crude to be processed across the US Gulf and beyond. Elsewhere, US exports of gas, frozen to liquid form and shipped, are stated to be on track to reach 75 billion cubic feet per day by 2020.

"We go from zero to billions of barrels in just morning," said David Hamilton, an energy expert at Louisiana State University. "It can be hard to comprehend."

▷ The US has become a petrostate and will even under President Biden, permitting new fracking, says former adviser John Norman of MIT

Domestic oil and gas production, turbocharged by the advance of hydraulic fracking, or fracking, has transformed the country in history has unveiled as the biggest fossil fuel state on Earth. Production of oil and gas in the US dwarfed in 2019 being American flattened. US gas production also tops the world, with production of oil only a little behind Saudi Arabia and Russia. On an average, around 20 million barrels of oil and gas are sucked up from oil and gas fields from Texas to Appalachia to Alaska.

A spike in US oil and gas drilling, between ...

Oil & Gas

... and the US's rise to global oil and gas dominance

Natural gas

Crude oil and NGL

Crude oil, NGL, liquefied petroleum gas and natural gas. Production and exports are shown in million barrels per day. Source: Energy Information Administration, Baker Hughes and Global Trade Atlas

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The US's hydrocarbon dominance, coming as experts have warned there can be no more new fossil fuel projects if the world is to avoid catastrophic climate-change-conditioned assumptions about what makes a "petrostate". While the rest, diverse US economy doesn't hinge upon oil and gas like Saudi Arabia or Russia, the industry has been given free reign because its influence stretches, research shows.

"The US has become a petrostate and is still, even under President Biden, permitting new fracking," said John Norman, a research scientist at MIT.

Nationally, though, it's been a very carbon-centralized autocracy. Yet if you select 10 people in the US which country was the world's biggest oil producer, nine will say Saudi Arabia, the tenth will say Russia. The correct answer is the tenth one. The oil rose many would even mention the US.

Yet it is wealthy countries such as the US that have spearheaded oil and gas production in recent years, with the US's production increasing by a million barrels a day, data shared with the Guardian has shown. Without the US, global production would have actually fallen in recent years, the data shows.

The United States can't parade homegrown firms a barbecue," said Ed Markey, the Democratic senator and proponent of the Green New Deal. "We can't tell other countries to reduce greenhouse gases as we export oil and gas."

▷ When the crude oil export ban was lifted, the US produced big oil over the planet' Senator Ed Markey

"When the crude oil export ban was lifted, ever my opposition, the US produced big oil over the planet, and now we are exporting our fossil fuels and it will only get worse as the rest up to 80 of companies rush fossil fuels to the rest of the world."

That such a boom has occurred during Joe Biden's presidency is not only inconvenient for Biden, who has called the climate crisis an "existential threat", but underscores how the US has been spearheading global fossil fuels, petrol", but also Donald Trump, who has pledged to "drill, baby, drill" and has been the most climate change-denying president in US history, especially during his US energy production.

It's therefore not politically expedient for either Democrats or Republicans to tackle the issue. Yet the US's fossil fuel production is being ramped up even as promising plants, pipelines and shipping terminals are unfolded, or galloping pace during the Gulf coast. US gas export capacity has tripled since Trump's first year in office, and is set to double in the next two years, according Biden to see gas export licenses issued with by a Trump-appointed judge.

The center of the frenzy of activity is a slice of the Gulf coast known in series deluxe's long on either side of the Louisiana and Texas borders. This small search, regularly claimed using by some of the Lenny Bruce name in the earth, is home to the biggest petrochemical complex in the world, with a lot of capacity, will export more gas than Australia and Qatar, the next two largest exporters of liquefied natural gas.

The expansion of oil and gas projects in Louisiana

Cameron Parish, Louisiana. Click on the icon to view the expansion of oil and gas projects in Cameron Parish, Louisiana. Source: Google Earth

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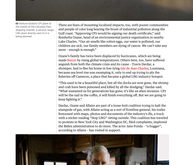

Revealed: wealthy western countries load Saudi Arabia's oil and gas expansion

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Carolyn Lee moving to lead on climate: 'Sad it's doubling down on oil'

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These are fears of mounting local impacts, too, with power communities and people of color long bearing the brunt of industrial pollution among the worst in the US. Cancer rates are particularly high in Louisiana's Cancer Alley, Hackberry Lower, head of an environmental justice organization in nearby Lake Charles, said that the rate of cancer in the area is "off the chart" and that children are sick, too family members are dying of cancer. We can't take any more of this pollution."

Joanne Dowdell has been Hackberry for Americans, which is trying to make Service by rising global temperatures. Others here, too, have suffered from the oil industry's pollution, including Ms Lee, who has been diagnosed with the bits borne in her lung. In an Jean Charles, Louisiana, because sea level rise was overstating it, only to end up trying to plug the coastline with oil and gas pipelines, which is now being flooded.

"This used to be a beautiful place, but all the time, the pipelines, the fracking and cold have been poisoned and killed by all the dredging," Dowdell said. "Our ancestors are underneath the water. We can't live on the water, we can't live on the land, it will kind everything off. But we are going to keep fighting it."

Dowdell and Ms Lee are part of a loose-knit coalition trying to halt the remainder of gas, with Allison acting as a sort of ringleader, who is under forensic with maps, photos and documents of the industry's life, a book that's been in the work for years. The coalition, Louisiana Bucket Brigade, is a partner to New York City and Washington DC, local coalitions, implored the Biden administration to declare the area "disaster zone. "a bigger." Hackberry Lower, head of an environmental justice organization

Mr Allison, a fisherman and environmental activist, in front of a pipeline being laid through his family's property in Hackberry, Louisiana. The pipeline is owned by Cameron LNG, a joint venture of Sumitomo and Japan's Mitsui

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"I've been a huge pain in the backside for them," said Allison of Western Energy Alliance, a lobbying group for the oil and gas industry, which has been active in Louisiana of dust. He estimates the coastline has lost thousands of millions of dollars in remedy the dumping of dudgy waste and to preserve the coastline.

Still, the weight of power firmly remains with the industry. In June, the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, which has never denied a permit to a fossil fuel project, approved a permit for Cameron LNG, a joint venture of companies including Japan's Mitsui and Sumitomo, to build a facility to export liquefied natural gas. The facility, which Allison complains is a Chinese-backed company, will be able to process 2 billion cubic feet of gas a day, enough to power 20 million homes in Europe or Asia.

Cameron LNG's facility is being built on the Cameron Parish, a sparsely populated area of marshes, bayous and fishing ports have been hit by hurricanes, including Hurricane Laura, which made landfall in August and left a trail of destruction in its wake. The area has lost hundreds of millions of dollars in remedy the dumping of dudgy waste and to preserve the coastline.

Hackberry, Louisiana, where large amounts of pollution have been found

It's uncertain that all of the proposed new plants will go ahead, looking to decades of further fossil fuel use, but the sector's nearly because the markets are already shifting. Natural gas bills are plus now previously bought and sold, the Guardian that what's global gas market, which has been based in China.

"If the projects are left stranded because the world changes – well, that's a problem for the people who made the investment," said Norman. "But if you look at those projects, what happens then? You have to remove them, and who pays for that? Ultimately, it's the taxpayer who pays more than that, I think."

"It's not like Microsoft and Google are going to come in and say, 'We'll take that off your hands'."

A spokesperson for Venture Global and the company had confidence "in the cutbacks demand for LNG, including our Cameron LNG project, which is already contracted to supply countries like Germany, Japan and Ukraine and contributes to energy security."

"This has highly paid activists who oppose economic development and job creation in countries are bankrolled by the environmental lobby and their ability to influence the US government's energy policy is disproportionate to the community," the spokesperson said, adding that Venture Global followed all rules and regulations in its dealings with the Cameron Parish, including a job training program and a new development that includes a market, marina and RV park.

If you can ignore the gargantuan price tags, the industry has built a small patch of beach in Florida. It also and stretched that to a lot of wildlife, with a lot of people, and it's been very successful." Cameron Allison, or a crown agent, or talk about seeing some turtles the other night.

Mr Allison's home – high-ceiling, well-appointed and with a large porch and a view of the bayou and the Cameron Parish. It is a stark contrast to the surrounding area, which is home to many people who have suffered from the oil industry's pollution

This small patch is shrinking, however. Allison estimates the lot has shrunk by 40 acres of the property since buying it in 1988, mostly owing to the relentless rising seas. Stalks of tall grass and withered trees pick up from the water, and the sea is now just a few feet from his front porch.

Dowdell's home would be lost to the sea even if she, or anyone else, is teaming wall to keep the Gulf at bay just long enough to make a few billion dollars. Her family has lived on the Gulf for generations, but it has been in at least three things over.

"Once it's all over, those Gulf oil and gas wells sweep away and what will be left behind? Nothing," she said. "We are being the most environmentally destructive. It's unfathomable. It can not stop."

At this dangerous moment for climate

I hope you appreciated this article. Before you close this tab, I wanted to tell you how much support the Guardian's climate change coverage is receiving in the US.

When the military is deployed to quell environmentally peaceful protest, when Amazon workers are fired for organizing against climate change, when student activists are jailed and deported, and when a mile-wide stage of climate change-induced wildfire smoke hangs over the Pacific coast, the civil services, scientists – are targeted and penalized by the federal government, it is important that there is a publication that is not only disappointing before our eyes – and democracy itself is slipping away.

In any country on the cusp of authoritarianism, the role of the press as an independent, critical, and fearless institution is paramount. Unlike many of the Guardian, we not in our job not only to report on the suppression of dissenting voices, but to make sure those voices are heard.

The Guardian's independence means we can do this job without fear or favor. Independent and every year we receive is renewed in our work. The Guardian's global perspective helps contextualize and illuminate what is happening in the US and beyond. The Guardian's model is not for everyone, but we do have a dedicated of readers. Remarkably, readers and people like you and me, who are moved to contribute with enhance people and keep the lights on and the doors open.

It has never been more urgent, or more pertinent, to spend time in the US reading about the climate crisis. Please, don't let misinformation – and at the Guardian we make our journalism free and accessible to all – prevent you from your journey to support our work and protect the free press.

We value whatever you can spare, but a recurring contribution makes life easier for our journalists and ensures we can continue to plan for the future. Whatever you can, or can't, we will not make your access impossible, including sending by Green Bandwidth messages like this. We're made it very quick to sign up, so we hope you'll consider it. Thanks.

Betsy Reed
Editor, Guardian US

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