

LOBBY WATCH



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‘Alpine High’

Jan. 11, 2017

Apache’s Giant Oil Find Exceeds its Political Heft

Gave More to Democratic Headliners than to Abbott

Houston-based Apache Corp. [announced](#) a gargantuan oil and gas find near West Texas’ Davis Mountains last September. The so-called “Alpine High” discovery—under a 60-mile-wide swath of Reeves County—could produce at least 3 billion barrels of oil from 3,000 drill sites in coming decades.

The discovery piqued environmental concerns because it underlies San Solomon Springs, which feeds a desert oasis in Balmorhea State Park. “If you start messing with this you can really start causing some damages and it can be gone,” local resident Maria Garza told [CBS](#).

To quell such concerns, Apache pledged not to drill within the state park or in Balmorhea city limits. A Texas Parks and Wildlife Department spokesperson [said](#) Apache is unlikely to harm the aquifer because it is drilling beneath the springs and “water doesn’t flow up-gradient.” Apache, which has a Reeves County Water District permit to tap local spring water, [says](#) it hopes not to use much of it. Instead, it plans to buy fresh and brackish water from ranchers and to recycle water.

Water intensive fracking produces millions of barrels of wastewater. A preliminary hydrology [report](#) commissioned by the environmental

group [Earthworks](#), raised a variety of concerns. These include the risk of drilling fluids migrating into the aquifer, oil and gas leaking from well holes, leaking wastewater storage tanks, or aquifer flow diminishing as a result of water consumption or due to fracking-related blockages. Discounting that report, Apache is [financing](#) its own studies with the University of Texas at Arlington.

For a year before announcing the find, Apache quietly bought up mineral rights to 300,000 acres, while drilling test wells. Because the discovery occurred in an area not considered conducive to oil production, Apache bought rights for about \$1,300 an acre, a fraction of the \$25,000 price paid a little farther north.

Apache’s PAC and executives have handed out almost \$320,000 to Texas PACs and politicians since 2010. During the same period, Texas energy giant Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) doled out [\\$2.7 million](#). As ETP CEO Kelcy Warren personally gave politicians \$2 million, Apache CEO John Christmann IV gave them nary a dime.¹ Gov. Greg Abbott—who appointed Kelcy Warren to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission—accounted for a third of ETP’s political largess yet collected just \$500 from a lone Apache executive.



Many Texas energy companies heavily favor Texas' Republican majority. While GOP Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick is the top recipient of Apache funds, the company's other favorites include recent Democratic gubernatorial nominees Bill White and Wendy Davis. Apache is predictably partial to the Texas Railroad Commissioners who regulate the energy industry. And it supported PACs promoting measures to fund water infrastructure projects. Apache-related donors also gave heavily to State Board of Education Board Chair [Donna Bahorich](#), the spouse of Apache executive Michael Bahorich.

How has Apache's mega-discovery affected its political giving? The table at the bottom right of this page shows Apache-related contributions during the 2016 election cycle, which roughly corresponds to the "Alpine High" period after Christmann [replaced](#) Apache CEO Steven Farris in early 2015.

Although Apache giving continued to be modest in this past cycle, it did focus on Texas' GOP hierarchy—particularly at the Railroad Commission. Once again, however, Gov. Abbott's absence was conspicuous.

Apache's Top Recipients (2010 through Dec. 2016)²

Amount	Recipient
\$29,500	Dan Patrick
\$25,000	Water Texas PAC
\$24,800	Bill White
\$21,700	Wendy Davis
\$15,000	*Ryan Sitton
\$15,000	Joe Straus
\$14,000	*Barry Smitherman
\$13,500	Glenn Hegar
\$13,000	*Christi Craddick
\$12,500	David Dewhurst
\$12,500	*David Porter
\$10,000	H2O4TEXAS PAC
\$9,200	Donna Bahorich
\$8,000	Warren Chisum
\$8,000	Jim Keffer
\$7,900	Jeff Weems
\$6,000	George P. Bush
\$3,500	Leticia Van de Putte
\$3,500	Tommy Williams
\$3,000	Harvey Hilderbran
\$2,600	Don Willett
\$2,500	*Wayne Christian
\$2,500	Bob Deuell
\$2,500	Troy Fraser
\$2,500	Don Huffines
\$2,500	Rene O. Oliveira
\$2,000	Sarah Davis
\$2,000	Kel Seliger
\$2,000	Shadwick, Lana S.
\$1,800	Maverick PAC
\$1,500	Carol Alvarado
\$1,500	Dennis Bonnen
\$1,500	Phil King
\$1,500	Barbara Ann Radnofsky
\$1,500	Richard Raymond

*Elected to Railroad Commission.

Top Apache-Related Contributors (2010 through Dec. 2016)²

Amount	Contributor (Affiliation)
\$205,500	Apache Corp. PAC
\$58,500	Urban 'Obie' O'Brien (VP Gov. Affairs)
\$9,500	G. Steven Farris (Ex-CEO)
\$8,500	Roger B Plank (Ex-President)
\$7,550	Stephen J Cox (Corp. Counsel)
\$6,000	Michael Bahorich (Exec. VP)
\$3,550	Raymond Plank (Founder & ex-Chair)
\$3,000	Anthony Lannie (Gen'l Counsel)

Top Apache Recipients In 2016 Election Cycle²

Amount	Recipient
\$10,000	Dan Patrick
\$5,000	*Christi Craddick
\$5,000	*David Porter
\$5,000	*Ryan Sitton
\$5,000	Joe Straus
\$3,250	Donna Bahorich
\$2,500	*Wayne Christian
\$2,500	Glenn Hegar

*Railroad Commissioner.

Apache's 2016 Texas Lobbyists

Lobbyist	Min. Value of Contract	Max. Value of Contract
Dan Hinkle	\$100,000	\$150,000
Urban 'Obie' O'Brien	\$50,000	\$100,000
Matthew Thompson	\$25,000	\$50,000
TOTALS	\$175,000	\$300,000



An ocean of oil lies under the West Texas desert.

Notes

¹ Christmann has not even contributed to Apache's PAC. Predecessor [G. Steven Farris](#), who resigned in January 2015, gave to the PAC and a few politicians.

² Candidates with opponents on the November 2016 ballot filed financial disclosures covering through October 2016; unopposed candidates disclosed contributions through June 2016. Researchers found an additional \$13,500 by examining Apache PAC monthly filings covering through December 2016.