

4-22-1998

U.S., Mexico Negotiate on Rights to Vast Track in Middle of Gulf of Mexico

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "U.S., Mexico Negotiate on Rights to Vast Track in Middle of Gulf of Mexico." (1998). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/3897>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

U.S., Mexico Negotiate on Rights to Vast Track in Middle of Gulf of Mexico

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1998-04-22

The US and Mexico have begun negotiations on rights to a huge area in the Gulf of Mexico outside the 320-km exclusive economic zones of the territorial limits of the two countries. The area, known as the Western Gap, is thought to hold vast deep-water reserves of crude oil and natural gas. The US initiated the talks to clarify whether US oil companies can begin extraction operations in the northern portion of the Western Gap. In late March, US and Mexican representatives met in Washington for initial discussions on which country should have jurisdiction over the area. The two countries could begin discussions because the US Senate last year finally ratified a 1978 treaty with Mexico that recognized 320-km territorial limits in the Gulf of Mexico (see SourceMex, 11/05/97).

A statement from the US State Department and Mexico's Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) said the initial discussions were conducted in a "positive spirit," and within the guidelines established by the 1978 treaty. The two countries have scheduled a follow-up meeting in Mexico City at the end of May. But the issue may not be resolved until late in the year, since negotiators are awaiting a technical report from a binational group of experts, due sometime in early September. SRE spokespersons said President Ernesto Zedillo's administration has entered the negotiations to find a compromise for US and Mexican rights to the area.

Leonora Rueda, the SRE's director of Mexico-US frontier issues, said the most viable option is to divide jurisdiction equally. But the SRE has also pledged to consider input from the Mexican Senate, which must ratify Mexico's international treaties. Sen. Jose Angel Conchello of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) says the entire Western Gap is a continuation of Mexico's continental shelf and therefore should be considered Mexican territory. "Even if the area does not have a single barrel of oil, we should claim our sovereign right to this area," Conchello said.

Still, Conchello acknowledges that Mexico's state-run oil company PEMEX lacks the funds and the technology to access the deep-water reserves and may accept a compromise that determines that the Western Gap belongs to neither the US nor Mexico. PEMEX's exploration and production activities have taken place in water that is at most 200 meters deep. In contrast, some US companies currently conduct exploration and extraction in waters as deep as 1,500 meters. To access reserves at the edges of the Western Gap, oil companies will have to drill in waters that are at least 2,300 meters deep.

Maria Fernanda Campa, a former PEMEX geologist, says US oil companies and PEMEX are most interested in areas near the edges of the Western Gap. "Nobody really knows for sure what lies in this hole in the middle of the Gulf," Campa said in an interview with the weekly business newspaper El Financiero Internacional. "What surrounds it is really important to everyone." (Sources: Excelsior, 01/23/98, 04/01/98; El Universal, 01/23/98, 03/25/98; El Economista, 01/25/98, 03/30/98; Reuter, 03/30/98; El Financiero Internacional, 04/06/98)

-- End --