

Eagle Ford Consortium to examine current, future impacts associated with communities in formation area

By Mike D. Smith

Friday, February 3, 2012

CORPUS CHRISTI — Eagle Ford Shale has produced more than 3,000 drilling permits and counting since the first well was drilled in 2008.

The oil and gas drilling has brought jobs, workers, construction, traffic, sales tax revenue windfalls and royalties.

That means finding housing, strengthening roads and having extra money to spend wisely among other issues — a daunting challenge for the mostly rural strip of Texas atop the formation.

Bringing together industry, elected officials, landowners, chambers of commerce and other stakeholders to share problems and devise solutions can help communities manage the boom and maximize Eagle Ford's benefits to boost their development.

That's the focus of the Eagle Ford Consortium, a group that has gathered steam and expanded its scope since forming in November 2010.

Today at Del Mar College's Center for Economic Development, the group will announce its first two-day conference scheduled in March in San Antonio about Eagle Ford impacts.

"The potential for it being long term is there, so this is an opportunity to set out plans that create sustainability," said José Ceballos, a consultant for the consortium with Totem Strategies.

Made up of several committees, the consortium will rotate meeting locations across the shale area to discuss known issues such as infrastructure and water concerns, while identifying others that haven't been addressed.

Examples are the impact of extra people and activity on rural hospital facilities and law enforcement challenges, said Leodoro Martinez, consortium chairman and executive director of the Middle Rio Grande Development Council.

"In rural, small communities you don't have the expertise sometimes that's necessary to deal with all these issues overnight," Martinez said.

Other focuses will include small business development and ensuring that cities plan their growth in a way that they prosper should the oil boom end.

"Something that at the end of the day, whether it's 10 years from now or 15 or 20, we're a better a community than we were the first day industry arrived," Martinez said.

There also are lessons to draw from other shale plays across the country. The conference next month will feature speakers on housing and economic development issues from the Bakken Shale region of North Dakota, where development is a few years ahead of Eagle Ford, Ceballos said.

For information about the consortium and the March conference, visit eaglefordconsortium.org.



© 2012 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online