

New study suggests US fracking boom may not last as long as predicted

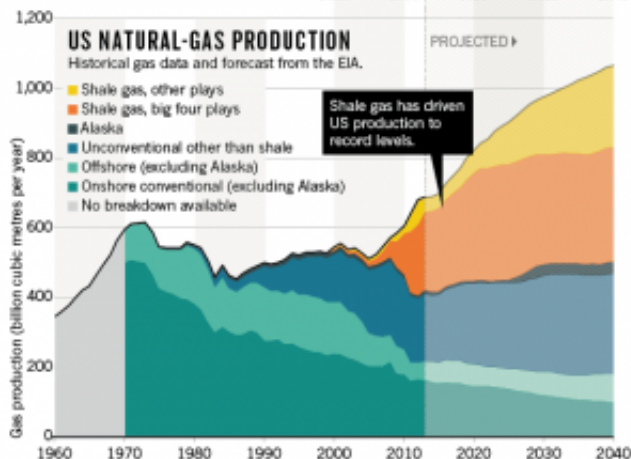
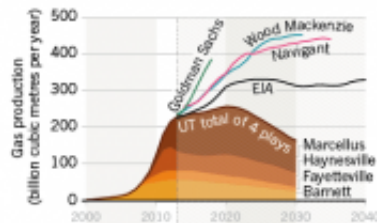
December 4 2014, by Bob Yirka

BATTLE OF THE FORECASTS

Production of natural gas in the United States is climbing rapidly, and the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicts long-term growth. But studies by the University of Texas (UT) challenge that forecast.

BIG FOUR SOURCES

The Texas team made forecasts for the four most productive shale-gas formations, or plays. Those forecasts suggest that gas production will peak soon and quickly drop, a much more pessimistic outlook than those offered by the EIA and several companies, such as Goldman Sachs.



Credit: EIA/Univ. Texas/Goldman Sachs/Wood Mackenzie/Navigant, via *Nature*, doi:10.1038/516028a

(Phys.org)—A team of researchers with the University of Texas has conducted an analysis of the fracking business in the United States and has found that the estimates made by other groups, most specifically the

Energy Information Administration (EIA) regarding the amount of natural gas that can be extracted, is much too high. In a *Nature News* Feature, team lead Mason Inman suggests that the boom may last just half as long as predicted.

Just half a decade ago geological experts with the government and in private industry were bemoaning the sad state of U.S. energy production. Gas prices were high causing the government to invest funds in renewable resources, but then, suddenly, hydraulic fracturing, now known the world over as fracking took off, offering industry and consumers a seemingly unending energy source. President Obama boasted that [fracking](#) would provide the U.S. and other countries with natural gas for a hundred years. That boast was slightly tempered when the EIA suggested that peak production would likely last up till 2040, and then taper off after that. Now, the Texas team is suggesting that even that estimate is too optimistic—they suggest the peak will likely come in 2020, and after that production will fall off dramatically.

The estimates differ, Inman says, because of differing approaches used to arrive at estimates. The Texas team used finer resolution he says, which offers a more realistic view of where we stand. As an example, he notes that the EIA made estimates based on county wide production in a given area, whereas the Texas team divided areas into one square mile units. Basing estimates on counties, he says, isn't fine enough because county size varies so much, with some as large as a thousand square kilometers. He and his team believe that the EIA also erred by overlooking human nature in the equation. Mining companies tend to look for the sweet spots, which is where production will be highest, he notes—once the sweet spots are depleted, production drops dramatically because there is less gas to be found, which means adding more costs to retrieve it.

Inman also claims that several other smaller university based studies

have found the EIA's estimates to be overly optimistic as well. He notes that it's critical that true [estimates](#) be made, as the future U.S. economy is being based on investments in [natural gas](#)—not getting it right could very well spell disaster.

More information: Natural gas: The fracking fallacy, *Nature* 516, 28–30 (04 December 2014) www.nature.com/news/natural-ga...king-fallacy-1.16430

© 2014 Phys.org

Citation: New study suggests US fracking boom may not last as long as predicted (2014, December 4) retrieved 21 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-12-fracking-boom.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.