Research grant to target 8M acre of oil formation

The Vermilion staff report

A $9.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy and other smaller energy companies has given the University of Louisiana at Lafayette the opportunity to create a new laboratory, the Tuscaloosa Marine Shale Laboratory, which will focus on research needed to develop and use the abundance of energy located in the 8-million-acre formation.

The Tuscaloosa Marine Shale is a huge geologic formation stretching throughout portions of central and south Louisiana and far into southwestern Mississippi. The formation is rumored to hold some 7 billion barrels of crude oil, but has eluded the oil and gas industry for quite some time.

The resources within the Tuscaloosa Marine Shale are encased in, as its name suggests, layers of shale, which do not allow for traditional extraction methods.

The use of any geological reservoir such as this requires ample planning, and, according to an article on the UL Lafayette website, the Tuscaloosa Marine Shale Laboratory will do just that.

“Our team will consider the engineering aspects of the TMS as well as the economic impact its development will have on the communities it touches,” Mehdi Mokhtari, Ph.D., an assistant professor in UL Lafayette’s Department of Petroleum Engineering, said in the article.

The team will include researchers from Los Alamos National Lab, New Mexico; Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla; the University of Oklahoma, Norman; and the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg. Members come from a wide variety of groups such as geophysicists, engineers, geologists and economic development specialists, as well as 18 graduate students from UL Lafayette or its partners.

Other areas have already pioneered the development of similar unconventional developments in places such as North Dakota, Texas, and along the east coast, according to Mokhtari.

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The development and use of the Tuscaloosa Marine Shale will increase the energy security in the U.S., Mokhtari added.

UL Lafayette was one of numerous groups to receive the grants from the U.S. Department of Energy; grants awarded totaled $30 million in federal funds.

Other grant recipients are as follows: Gas Technology Institute, Des Plaines, Illinois; the Colorado School of Mines, Golden; Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg; C-Crete Technologies, Stafford, Texas; and Texas A&M University’s Engineering Experiment Station, College Station.