



## **ABUNDANCE VS. SCARCITY: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!**

Policies based on the abundance worldview have proven to be the wise method of governing natural resource use.

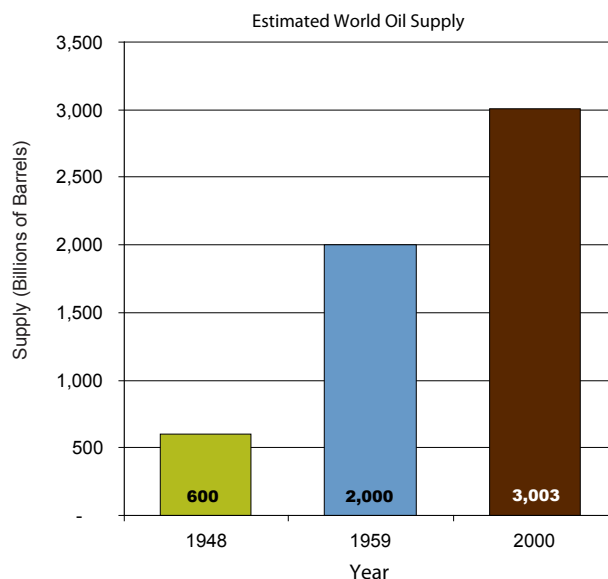
**FACT: THE WORLD'S  
CURRENT ESTIMATED  
SUPPLY OF OIL IS OVER  
500 TIMES WHAT IT WAS  
THOUGHT TO BE IN 1948**

Many natural-resource policy debates stem from the differences between two natural-resource paradigms: scarcity and abundance. The scarcity worldview has argued that our finite natural resources cannot long support a growing human population. Accordingly, public policy should reflect this reality and indefinitely restrict access to natural resources. Conversely, the abundance worldview argues that natural resources are sufficient to support mankind. Policy, instead of restricting access to natural resources, should focus on conserva-

tion and proper stewardship of those resources. The wisdom of abundance-based policy is borne out in evidence from both the past and the present.

In 1948, the world's estimated supply of oil was 600 billion barrels.<sup>1</sup> By 1959 that estimate had jumped to two trillion barrels, and in 2000 was estimated to be over three trillion barrels: over 500 times the 1948 estimates. The reported reasons for the upward revisions were that our ability to gather quality information had increased, and that estimating methods had improved. In other words, it was because inherently imperfect human abilities and methods advanced.

As in the past, present-day scarcity advocates argue that our natural resources are quickly becoming exhausted.<sup>2</sup> However, as the post-WWII era figures illustrate, it is arrogant to presume that estimates about natural resource supplies are perfect. It is just as unwise to lock away those resources based on that information. Rather, the prudent action is to con-



serve natural resources, since there is a high likelihood that our current information and estimating methods are still incomplete.

Present-day evidence confirms the wisdom of abundance-based policy. For instance, the Kennecott copper mine was once projected to die out by 2013.<sup>3</sup> However, due to rising mineral prices and technological improvements, the life of the mine has been extended several years and may be even indefinitely. Technological innovation and market forces can extend the life of natural resources beyond the limits of our current understanding.

It is unwise to enact rash policies that lock away valuable natural resources based upon an imperfect human understanding of a complex world. Where would our standard of living be today if post-WWII policies had done this, based on the assessment of the world's oil supplies at the time? As the examples illustrate, using abundance-based

policies to govern access to Utah's natural resources will not only encourage proper stewardship, but will also improve the living standards of Utahns, both present and future. Utah's natural-resources policies should reflect this reality so that all generations can enjoy the abundance our state has to offer.

## ENDNOTES

1. Wood, John and Gary Long. 2000. "Published Estimates of World Oil Ultimate Recovery." Energy Information Administration. At [http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil\\_gas/petroleum/presentations/2000/long\\_term\\_supply/sld009.htm](http://www.eia.doe.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/presentations/2000/long_term_supply/sld009.htm).
2. Kovarik, Bill. 2003. "The Oil Reserve Fallacy: Proven Reserves are Not a Measure of Future Supply." At <http://www.runet.edu/~wkovarik/oil/5oilreservehistory.html>.
3. Mining-Technology.com. 2007. "Rio Tinto – Bingham Canyon Copper Mine, UT, USA." SPG Media Limited. At <http://www.mining-technology.com/projects/ingham/>.