OIL AND NATURAL GAS PRICE OUTLOOK

The first quarter of 2020 was the worst quarter on record for oil prices, with the U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) declining 66% from $61 to $20 per barrel during the quarter. Oil prices were hit by the drastic loss in demand from the COVID-19 pandemic combined with an increase in oil supply following the collapse of the OPEC+ alliance in March 2020. Although the OPEC+ alliance was able to reach agreement on a historic production cut in terms of size and duration, the near-term outlook for oil prices remains very challenging, as the loss in oil demand from the COVID-19 pandemic is too large to adequately offset with production cuts. Oil inventories are building rapidly around the world and will likely remain bloated well into 2021, which will keep a lid on oil prices.

Long-term, we expect oil prices in the U.S. to be between $45 to $65 per barrel, reflecting the volatile nature of the commodity, as large price swings are common. Assuming OPEC+ adheres to its production-cut agreement and oil demand begins to recover in the second half of 2020, we expect global oil inventories to return to more normal levels by the end of 2021. A key risk to our long-term outlook is the pace of oil demand growth, which is less certain given the global economy's transition towards a lower-carbon future. In the short term, we expect oil prices to remain well below this range, and we expect significant price volatility to continue.

We see natural gas prices in the U.S. ranging from $2.00 to $3.50 per thousand cubic feet over the long term. Natural gas prices can swing significantly based on changes in weather. We expect prices to be near the lower end of our expected range in 2020 as supply growth continues to outpace demand growth. Demand growth has been strong, driven by liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports and increasing usage for power generation. Hotter summers and colder winters tend to drive higher demand and prices in the shorter term. In coming years, we expect that growing LNG exports and further usage growth for power generation should help support prices in our long-term range.

GUIDANCE

Despite stocks trading at wide discounts to historic valuation levels, broad negative sentiment towards the energy sector is likely to remain a headwind until there is less oversupply of oil. Energy stocks can be very volatile given the commodity-sensitive nature of cash flows. In looking through these short-term movements, we see long-term upside potential in our Buy-rated stocks. We prefer energy stocks in the integrated oil & gas, storage & transportation, and refining & marketing subsectors, where companies have strong balance sheets that allow them to weather commodity-price weakness and support dividends.
What Is Our Outlook for Oil Prices?
The first quarter of 2020 was the worst quarter on record for oil prices, with the U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) declining 66% from $61 to $20 per barrel during the quarter. Oil prices were hit by the drastic loss in demand from the COVID-19 pandemic combined with an increase in oil supply following the collapse of the OPEC+ alliance in March 2020. Although the OPEC+ alliance was able to reach agreement on a historic production cut in terms of size and duration, the near-term outlook for oil prices remains very challenging, as the loss in oil demand from the COVID-19 pandemic is too large to adequately offset with production cuts. Oil inventories are building rapidly around the world and will likely remain bloated well into 2021, which will keep a lid on oil prices.

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Figure 1

Source: FactSet, data as of 5/1/2020.
Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

What Is the Status of the Global Oil Supply?
OPEC
The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), along with Russia and 10 other non-OPEC countries (collectively referred to as OPEC+), have been curtailing oil production since early 2017 to offset the growth in U.S. oil production in order to keep oil supply balanced with oil demand. Combined, OPEC+ accounts for nearly half of the world’s oil production. In March 2020, OPEC+ failed to reach an agreement to increase production cuts in response to reduced demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Russia was not on board with additional cuts, and Saudi Arabia (the de facto head of OPEC) was unwilling to shoulder the burden of additional cuts. With no agreement in place, Saudi Arabia responded by starting a price war with Russia. This was an unexpected and dramatic turn of events for the oil market, which was already suffering from reduced demand due to COVID-19. As a result, oil prices fell precipitously to $20 per barrel in the U.S.

A month later in April 2020, OPEC+ met again to address the rapidly deteriorating oil market. This time the group was able to agree to a historic production cut. The alliance agreed to reduce its oil production by 9.7 million barrels of oil per day in May and June, followed by a 7.7 million barrels of oil per day cut from July through December 2020. This will be followed by a 5.8 million barrels of oil per day cut for 16 months, from January 2021 to April 30, 2022.

While the production cut agreement is historic in terms of its size and duration, it unfortunately is not enough to balance the oil market given the drastic loss in demand from the COVID-19 containment measures. On the positive side, the production cuts will help reduce the large build in oil inventories that is occurring around the world. On the negative side, stabilization in oil prices at sub-$30 per barrel or even sub-$40 per barrel would still be a devastating blow to the North American oil sector because most companies are not profitable at those levels.

United States
Since the discovery of fracking technology that made vast amounts of crude oil resources economic to develop, U.S. oil production has risen from 5 million barrels per day a decade ago to 13 million barrels per day (see Figure 2). U.S. oil production grew 1.6 million barrels per day in 2018 and 1.3 million barrels per day in 2019. The vast majority of U.S. production growth has come from three main areas: the Permian basin in West Texas, the Eagle Ford shale in south Texas, and the Bakken area in North Dakota. Collectively, these three areas account for over 80% of U.S. oil production growth. The Permian basin alone accounts for nearly one-third of total U.S. oil production. Before the severe drop in oil prices in early 2020, U.S. oil production was expected to grow by nearly 1 million barrels per day in 2020. As producers drastically curtail drilling activity in response to low oil prices, we expect U.S. production...
to decline in 2020 and likely in 2021, depending on how long the oil-price downturn lasts.

**Figure 2**

**U.S. Oil Production**

(Thousand Barrels Per Day)

![U.S. Oil Production Chart](image)

Source: Energy Information Administration

**Canada**

In Canada, oil sands growth is expected to slow significantly. Over the past decade, oil sands production grew at an average annual rate of around 9.5%. Over the next decade, oil sands production is estimated to grow at an average annual rate of around 2%, according to the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, as existing projects see small incremental capacity expansions (see **Figure 3**). While the oil sands will help satisfy global demand growth over the next decade, it will remain challenged to compete with low-cost areas with a smaller environmental impact. As producers drastically curtail drilling activity in response to low oil prices, we expect Canadian production to decline in 2020 and likely in 2021, depending on how long the oil price downturn lasts.

**Figure 3**

**Canadian Oil Sands Production (million barrels of oil per day)**

![Canadian Oil Sands Production Chart](image)

Source: Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

The vast majority of oil sands output is exported by pipeline to the U.S. where it is refined into finished products such as gasoline, diesel and heating oil. With the start-up of new oil sands production at the end of 2017, there is currently not enough pipeline capacity to transport all the oil production coming out of western Canada. However, there are three large pipeline projects in the works (see **Figure 4**), but environmental and regulatory headwinds have resulted in significant delays in moving these projects forward. Until new pipeline capacity is added, incremental production will need to move to market via rail. This is a much more expensive and less efficient option than pipelines.

**Figure 4 - Projected Pipeline Capacity**

[Chart showing projected pipeline capacity]

Source: Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and Edward Jones Equity Research

To address the issue of oil production exceeding pipeline capacity, the government of Alberta mandated a reduction in oil production to improve the price of Western Canadian Select (WCS). Beginning in 2019, Alberta reduced production by 325,000 barrels per day, or approximately 9%. This amount has been gradually lowered to a decrease in production of 75,000 barrels per day. The production reduction has been extended to the end of 2020.

**Figure 5**

**Global Oil Supply**

(Million Barrels Per Day)

![Global Oil Supply Chart](image)

Source: International Energy Agency
What Is the Status of Global Oil Demand?

Global oil demand was 100 million barrels per day in 2019 according to the International Energy Agency. The majority of oil demand growth comes from China and India, with China alone accounting for nearly 50% of global demand growth over the past five years. Given the significant disruptions to travel and trade from the COVID-19 pandemic, global oil demand is expected to fall by over 9 million barrels of oil per day in 2020, according to the International Energy Agency. This approximate 9% decline would be the largest decline in annual oil demand and the first negative-demand-growth year in over a decade. The pace of oil-demand recovery is dependent upon when containment measures are lifted, which is likely to be gradual. We expect global oil demand to rebound in 2021 (see Figure 6).

In the long term, we think oil demand will continue to grow, reflecting rising needs in the developing world from a growing middle class offsetting declining or flat demand in developed economies. In addition, demand for byproducts like chemicals and plastics will likely continue to grow with the global economy. However, we expect global oil demand to eventually peak, potentially in the next two decades. While electric vehicles (EVs) get most of the headlines for reducing oil demand in the future, it will likely be more from improved internal combustion engines (ICEs). ICEs will outnumber EVs for the foreseeable future, but will use less fuel in the future. EVs will likely see significant growth, but face several barriers to widespread acceptance despite growing interest and government incentives. These barriers include strong competition from more efficient and cheaper ICEs, the need for government subsidies and mandates to incentivize buyers, and limited battery lives and expensive replacement. While some factors may be improved upon, it is unlikely for all of them to be mitigated in the near term.

What About Natural Gas Prices?

We see U.S. natural gas prices ranging from $2.00 to $3.50 per thousand cubic feet over the long term. Natural gas prices can swing significantly based on changes in weather. We expect prices to be near the lower end of our range in 2020 as supply growth continues to outpace demand growth. Demand growth has been strong, driven by liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports and increasing usage for power generation. Hotter summers and colder winters tend to drive higher demand and prices in the shorter term. In coming years, we expect that growing LNG exports and further usage growth for power generation should help support prices.

How Do Energy Stocks Fit Into a Diversified Portfolio?

Despite stocks trading at wide discounts to historic valuation levels, broad negative sentiment towards the energy sector is likely to remain a headwind until there is less oversupply of oil. We expect oil prices in the U.S. to range between $45 to $65 per barrel over the long term, reflecting the volatile nature of oil prices. Energy stocks can be very volatile given the commodity-sensitive nature of cash flows. In looking through these short-term movements, we see long-term upside potential in our Buy-rated stocks. We prefer energy stocks in the integrated oil & gas, storage & transportation, and refining & marketing subsectors, where companies have strong balance sheets that allow them to weather commodity-price weakness and support dividends. We recommend a 5% weighting in the energy sector in a well-diversified portfolio. See the list on page 1 for all of our Buy-recommended energy stocks.

Valuation -- We believe the current valuation of the energy stocks listed on page 1 are attractive.
Methods used to evaluate the attractiveness of energy stocks include the price-to-operating cash flow (P/CF) ratio; enterprise value (market capitalization plus debt) to earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (EV/EBITDA); along with a discounted cash flow analysis in certain situations. Some traditional measures like price-to-earnings (P/E), price-to-book value (P/B), and price-to-earnings to earnings plus growth (PEGY) are not applicable to the energy sector.

Risks -- Some of the primary risks of the energy sector: volatile commodity prices, which are cyclical and will affect earnings and the stock price; reduced company growth expectations; cash liquidity; demand being difficult to predict and which could change at unexpected rates; foreign operations being affected by political uncertainties and currency fluctuations; regulatory changes affecting company operations; and adverse legal decisions.

Please see the full opinions of the individual companies mentioned in this report for additional information, including valuation and risks.

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