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The Ongoing Development of the Upper Cube; Adding Sticks Across the Uinta Basin

Speaker: Riley Brinkerhoff, HIVE Partners

After large deals in 2024 and increased rig-counts in 2025, Uinta operators are searching for new reserves in 2026. Low oil prices and a need to find value in existing acreage means that everyone has to make bigger wells with less. Enter the Uinta Upper Cube.

This presentation will briefly review the status of the Uinta horizontal oil play, what zones are being targeted and where, and the results that different operators are seeing. Providing a definition of the upper cube, why it is developed separately from the lower cube, and what drillable zones exist within it. Following with an examination of the technical limits for the play, and what may be done to expand it, including the wells that have tested it so far.

Upper Cube rocks of the Green River Formation in the Uinta Basin of NE Utah represents lacustrine sediments from fluvial-deltaic sediments of the Douglas Creek Member to the rich oil shales and argillaceous dolostones of the overlying Parachute Creek Member. As such, Upper Cube stratigraphy is distinguished by argillaceous mudstones, lack of molluscan fauna and interspersed, rather isolated, fluvial-dominated deltaic sets. In the deep Uinta Basin where it has proven oil production, it ranges from 800' to 1700' thick. Hydrocarbon productivity in this member is strongly influenced by its depositional and burial history, which controls organic richness, thermal maturity, and reservoir quality. Unlike the more prolific Uteland Butte, the Upper Cube's hydrocarbon potential is largely limited to portions of the Uinta Basin where it has achieved a thermal maturation of at least 1.0 VRo. Otherwise, connate waters from poorly to completely uncharged dolostones and sandstones tend to overwhelm potential oil production.

The presentation will close with some predictions for the Uinta Basin Upper Cube, both on where near-term development will occur, plus what drivers and risks operators are considering.

Biography

Riley Brinkerhoff is a petroleum geologist and most recently helped found HIVE Partners, which is focused on Uinta horizontal developments. In 2024, he raised $30 MM and spearheaded the successful Upper Cube NE extension. In 2025, HIVE raised another $120 MM and is pushing new Upper Cube wells across the Uinta Basin. Prior to HIVE, Riley served as exploration manager for WEM beginning in 2019, raising $550 MM for various Uinta Basin developments, most particularly as the exploration geologist in 130 play-expanding wells in five distinct target horizons. Before WEM, he worked as an asset and BD geologist at Newfield, SM Energy and QEP. He started his career at BP America. Riley holds bachelor's and master's degrees in geology from Brigham Young University and an MBA from the University of Utah.