Enhanced Geothermal Systems (EGS): Comparing Water and CO_2 as Heat Transmission Fluids

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U.S. Geothermal Resources are Huge

Heat content in subsurface rocks to 6 km depth, relative to ambient temperature

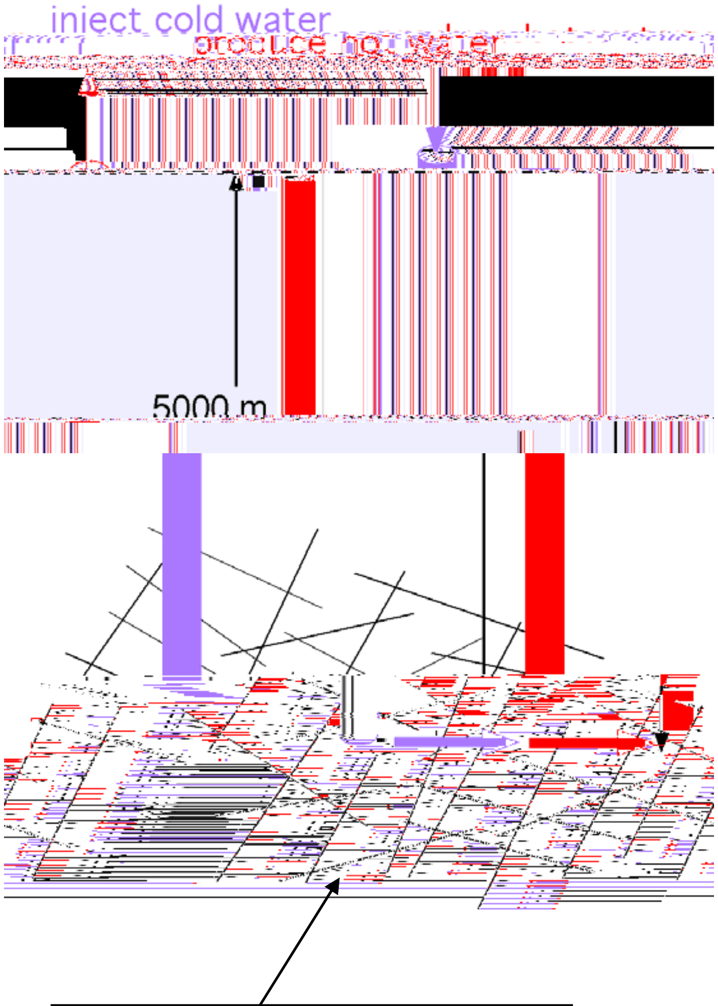
(Dave Blackwell, SMU)

Why is Geothermal Energy Contribution so Small?

- Geothermal energy extraction is currently limited to hydrothermal systems (the “low-hanging fruit”).
- There is a vast store of geothermal heat that is difficult to recover (hot rocks lacking fluid and permeability).
- How can the essentially inexhaustible heat in deep geologic formations be tapped and transferred to the land surface for human use?

Source: Geothermal Education Office (GEO)
http://www.geothermal.marin.org/

Enhanced Geothermal Systems (EGS)



fracture network in hot rock

- Artificially create permeability through hydraulic and chemical stimulation.
- Transfer heat to the land surface by circulating water through a system of injection and production boreholes.
- Experimental projects in U.S., U.K., France, Japan, Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany.
- EGS is currently not economically viable; the chief obstacles are:
  - ü dissolution and precipitation of rock minerals, that may cause anything from short-circuiting flows to formation plugging
  - ü large “parasitic” power requirements for keeping water circulating
  - ü water losses from the circulation system
  - ü inadequate reservoir size - heat transfer limitations
  - ü high cost of deep boreholes (≈ 5 km)

How about using CO_2 as Heat Transmission Fluid?

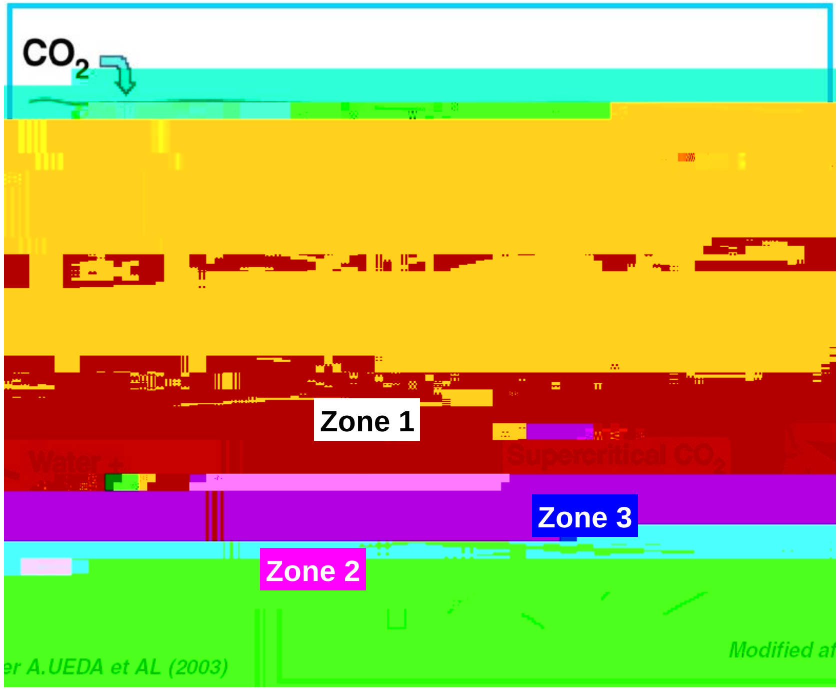
property	CO_2	water
chemistry	**poor solvent for rock minerals**	powerful solvent for rock minerals: lots of potential for dissolution and precipitation
fluid circulation in wellbores	**highly compressible and larger expansivity** **==> more buoyancy, lower parasitic power consumption**	low compressibility, modest expansivity ==> less buoyancy
ease of flow in reservoir	**lower viscosity**, lower density	higher viscosity, **higher density**
heat transmission	smaller specific heat	**larger specific heat**

Favorable properties are shown **bold-faced**.

EGS-CO_2 Issues

- Effectiveness of CO_2 as a heat transfer medium.
- Other processes induced by CO_2, that may affect feasibility and sustainability of EGS with CO_2 (chemical reactions, corrosion).
- Can we make an EGS-CO_2 reservoir? (Circulate CO_2 to remove the water.)
- Energy conversion system (binary plant w/ heat exchanger; directly using CO_2 on the turbines)
- Economics.
- Fluid lost = fluid stored?

General Makeup of a CO_2-Based EGS Reservoir



(after Christian Fouillac et al., *Third Annual Conference on Carbon Capture and Sequestration*, Alexandria, VA, May 3-6, 2004)

Zone 1

Central zone and core of EGS system, where most of the fluid circulation and heat extraction is taking place. This zone contains supercritical CO_2; all water has been removed by dissolution into the flowing CO_2.

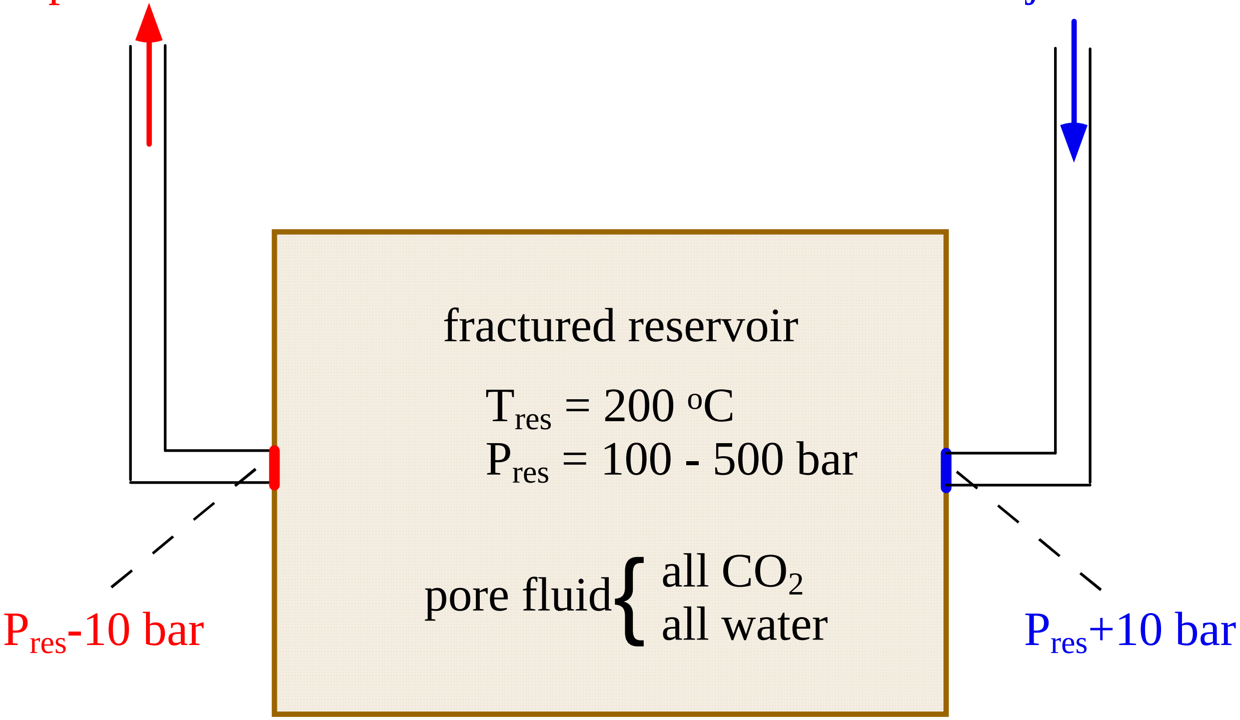
Zone 2

An intermediate region with weaker fluid circulation and heat extraction, which contains a two-phase mixture of CO_2 and water.

Zone 3

The outer region affected by EGS activities. The fluid is a single aqueous phase with dissolved CO_2.

Comparing Operating Fluids for EGS: CO_2 vs. Water



production

injection

fractured reservoir

T_{res} = 200 °C
P_{res} = 100 - 500 bar

pore fluid { all CO_2
all water

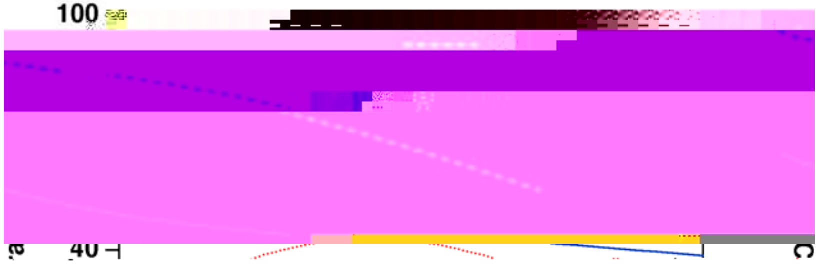
P_{res}-10 bar

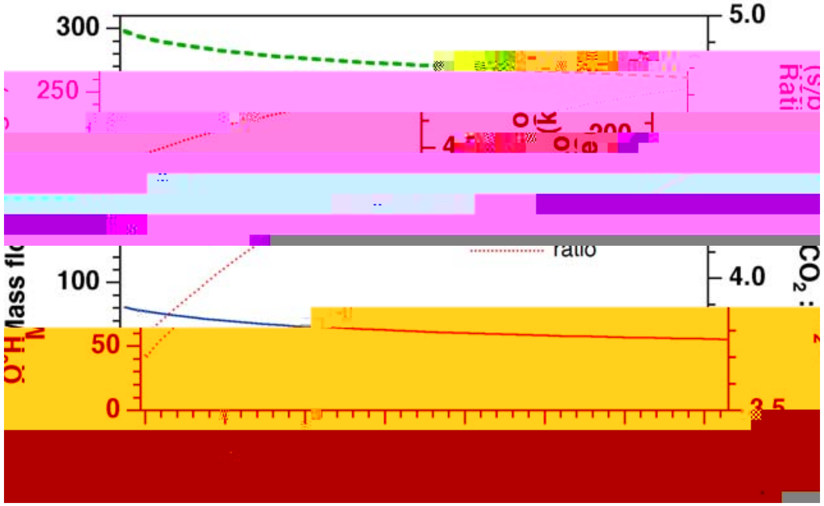
P_{res}+10 bar

ü monitor mass flow, heat extraction rates

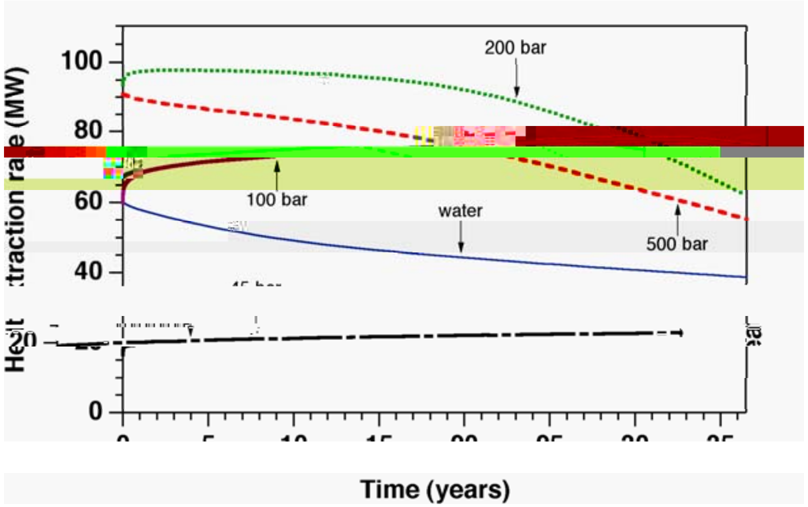
Reference Case

$T_{res} = 200\ ^\circ C,\ P_{res} = 500\ \text{bar},\ T_{inj} = 20\ ^\circ C$



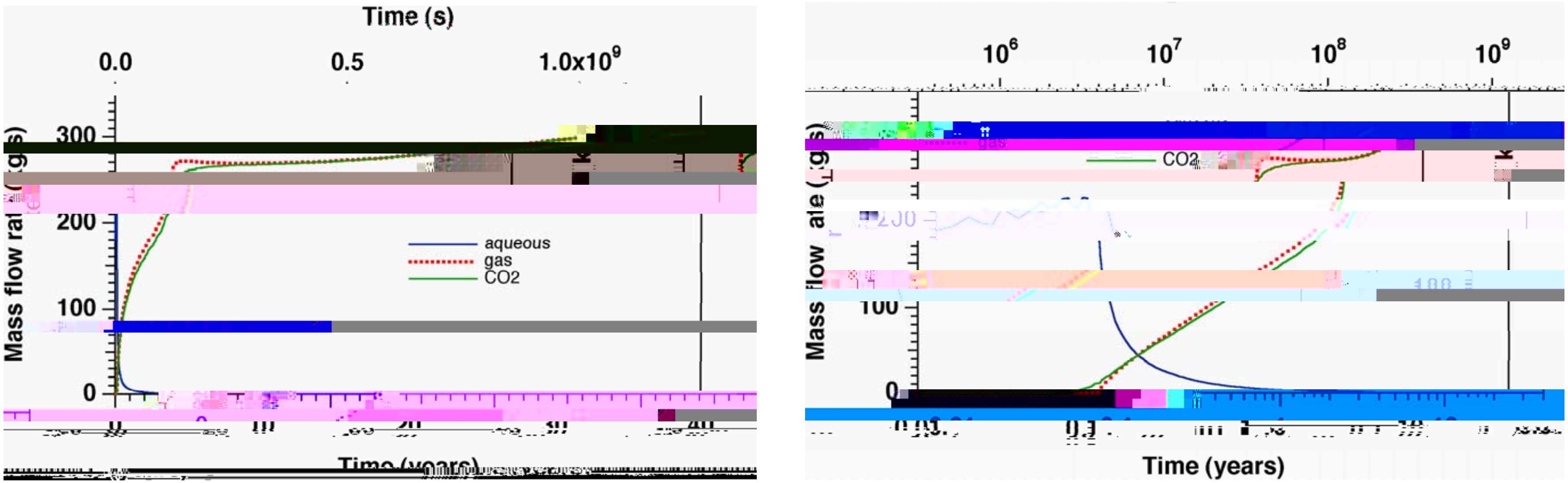


Simulation Results for Different Reservoir Pressures at T = 200 °C



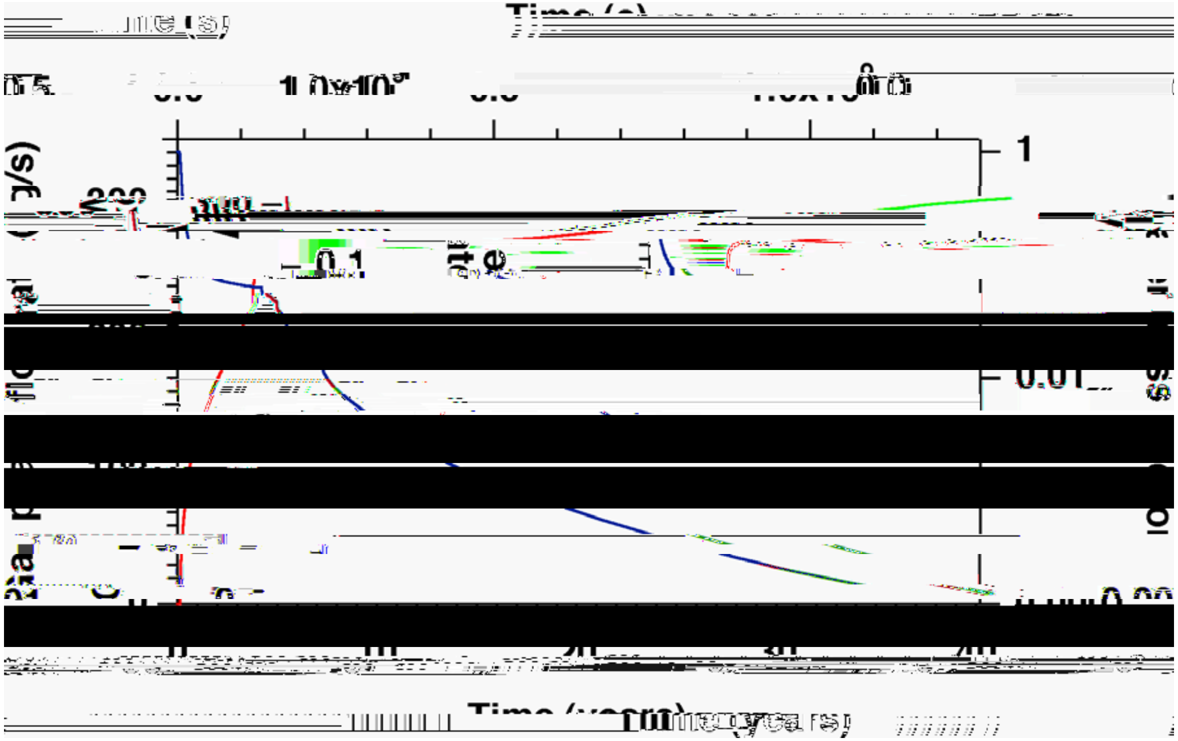
Fluid Mobility

Injecting CO_2 into an Aqueous System



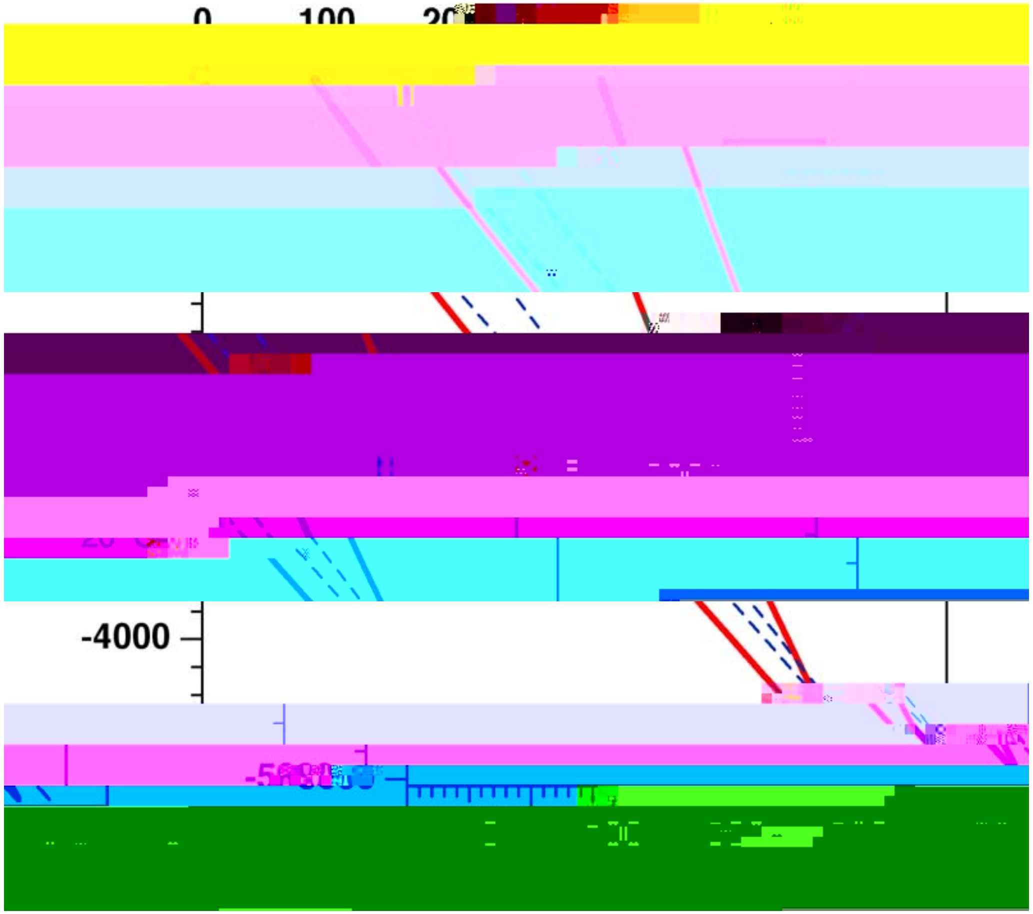
- At early time (≤ 0.1 year), produce single-phase water
- This is followed by a two-phase water-CO_2 mixture (0.1 - 2.5 yr)
- Total production rate during two-phase period is low due to phase interference
- Subsequently produce a single supercritical CO_2-rich phase with dissolved water

Rate and Composition of Produced CO_2



Wellbore Flow: CO_2 vs. Water

ΔP



Pressure difference between production and injection well

CO_2: 288.1 - 57.4 = 230.7 bar

water: 118.6 - 57.4 = 61.2 bar

CO_2 generates much larger pressures in production well, facilitating fluid circulation.

CO_2 Storage Capacity

- Need a mass flow of approximately 20 tons of CO_2 per second, per GW electric power capacity.
- Expect a fluid loss rate of order 5%, or **1 ton per second of CO_2 per GW** of installed EGS capacity.
- This is equivalent to **CO_2 emissions from 3 GW** of coal-fired power generation.
- The MIT report (2006) projects 100 GW of EGS electric power by 2050.
- 100 GW of EGS with CO_2 would **store 3.2 Gt/yr** of CO_2, approximately

Power Generation from CO_2-Based EGS

- One option is **binary conversion** technology, using similar equipment as water-based systems.
- Alternatively, it may be possible to **directly feed the produced CO_2** to the turbines. This may be possible because supercritical CO_2 without admixed liquid water is not corrosive to metals.
- Direct expansion of CO_2 in the turbines would avoid otherwise inevitable and irreversible heat losses in a heat exchanger.
- However, the produced

Path Forward*

- Fluid-rock reaction experiments with supercritical CO_2
- Laboratory flow experiments for water-CO_2 mixtures and pure anhydrous CO_2
- Modeling of fluid flow, heat transfer and rock-fluid interactions (chemical/mechanical)
- Design studies for a field pilot test of EGS with CO_2

*cooperation with BRGM - French geological survey

Concluding Remarks

- Water-based enhanced geothermal systems (EGS) face difficult hurdles to (1) achieve adequate heat extraction rates, and (2) maintain injectivity and heat extraction performance in the face of strong rock-fluid interactions.
- CO_2 has attractive properties as a heat transmission fluid for EGS.

- The fluid produced from an EGS operated with CO_2 will change from initially water (≈ 1 month), to a two-phase aqueous-CO_2 mixture (a few years), to $scCO_2$ with dissolved water of order 0.1 wt.-%.
- Use of CO_2 as heat transmission fluid for EGS looks promising and

Reactivity of Rocks for $scCO_2$

Rock type	Characteristics
granite	ü generally high in SiO_2, low in carbonates ü limited surface area and reactivity of mineral grains
sandstone	ü may have carbonate cements