

The Honorable Ryan Zinke US Secretary of the Interior Department of the Interior 1849 C Street NW Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

As a united group of 227 state legislators representing 17 coastal states, we are writing to you to oppose the Proposed National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024 (Proposed Leasing Program). This proposal seeks to exponentially expand oil and gas exploration, production, and drilling in the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and Gulf of Mexico, which for many of us, represents the first time in decades our coasts would be exposed to such development. While these oil and gas reserves are technically recoverable, we urge you to consider the repercussions, as you have done so in Florida, to local and regional economies and ecosystems.

We are encouraged by your recent action to remove Florida’s coasts from the Proposed Leasing Program, a decision based on potential threats that offshore drilling would impose on coastal tourism, the recreational economy, and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that depend upon it. Given that one state has been removed from the program, we strongly urge you to grant other states the same opportunity to protect their economy and coastal and marine resources.

Coastal tourism, fisheries, shipping, and defense are not only critical economic drivers in Florida, but are the underpinning of all U.S. coastal states. NOAA reports that coastal communities alone provide 45 percent of our nation’s gross domestic product. Furthermore, California, Oregon, and Washington combined represent the fifth largest economy *in the world,* a level of prosperity that would not be achieved without their ocean-dependent industries. It is clear that U.S. coastlines are a fundamental part of the nation’s economic activity and would be threatened by the offshore drilling plan.

Offshore exploration, construction, and drilling can damage marine habitats and injure or kill the animals in the surrounding area through direct impact and altering of light and sound environments. The significant impacts associated with offshore oil and gas development pale in comparison to the impacts associate with those of oil spills. Examples from across the country highlight the irreparable damage infringed upon coastal communities and ecosystems due to these accidents. After the Exxon Valdez oil tanker crashed in Alaska’s Prince William Sound in 1989, 11 million gallons of oil spilled

1 NOAA <https://toolkit.climate.gov/topics/marine/fisheries-and-coastal-communities>

2 TIME Magazine <http://time.com/3748246/exxon-valdez-history/>

1. Columbia University <http://bit.ly/2rlf3vh>
2. TIME Magazine [http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1986323,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0%2C8599%2C1986323%2C00.html)

and polluted over 1000 miles of coastline. This spill decimated the environment, killing thousands of salmon, otters, and eagles, as well as a quarter of a million seabirds 2. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina caused over 40 spills and 8 million gallons of expelled oil. One of the most significant accidents during the hurricane was the Murphy Oil Refinery spill, which released over 1 million gallons of oil, contaminating flood waters and harming over 1000 adjacent homes 3.

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico alone – which resulted in 210 *million* gallons of oil entering the Gulf and caused billions of dollars in damage to local fisheries and tourism industries 4– provides ample evidence that accidents can and do happen. As these examples highlight, no amount of planning or resources could fully mitigate the harm done to animals, fisheries, tourism, and the economy in the event of an accident. However, the probability of these spills occurring only increases if U.S. coastlines are opened to offshore drilling under the Proposed Leasing Program.

The Proposed Leasing Program claims that these new oil and gas projects will create jobs and bolster the U.S. economy, but with the risk of spills, and the threats of exploration and production alone, the Program will ultimately hurt coastal economies’, and that of their entire states, more than it will benefit them.

Our coastlines serve as a significant economic driver that is entirely dependent upon healthy marine life and coastal ecosystems. Not only will offshore drilling hurt state economies, but this construction would also negatively affect diverse ecosystems and fishing and shipping sectors.

Considering this threat to coastal ecosystems and economies, we oppose the Proposed Leasing Program and urge you to at least grant all coastal states with the opportunity to opt out of these leases. We are heartened by your exemption of Florida and hope you take our request into consideration. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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