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**Scoping Comments for the 2017-2022 Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing Program
Programmatic EIS**

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Comments

**RE: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Notice: Environmental Impact
Statements; Availability, etc.: Outer Continental Shelf, 2017-2022 Oil and Gas Leasing
Program; Scoping**

I am writing as a representative of the officers and membership of NY4Whales, the New York Whale and Dolphin Action League (ny4whales.org), a 501c-3 non-profit cetacean advocacy organization, and the NY project of Cetacean Society International, who stand opposed to the proposed oil and gas leasing program for the Outer Continental Shelf, 2017-2022, western Atlantic Ocean.

There are several reasons for objecting to the leasing program, and the creation of a concurrent Environmental Impact Statement. The public, aka taxpayers, should not be forced to support a plan that is uneconomical, high risk, and unsound. Given the small amounts of oil and gas available on the OCS, the high risk and surety of detriment to the public and environment, there is little justification to proceed further with this lease plan.

TOO SMALL AMOUNT OF OIL TO EXTRACT FOR USE

The [Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/us/politics/white-house-to-propose-allowing-oil-drilling-off-atlantic-coast.html?_r=0) estimates that there are 3.3 billion barrels of recoverable oil on the Atlantic's outer continental shelf and 31.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/us/politics/white-house-to-propose-allowing-oil-drilling-off-atlantic-coast.html?_r=0

The U.S. Energy Information Administration tells us that the US consumed 6.95 billion barrels in 2014. This translates to the cost, both environmental and monetary, of drilling the Mid-Atlantic States will supply only one half of one year's consumption of oil in the US. Hardly worth the risk.

How much oil is consumed in the United States?

...The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) includes volumes of biofuels in data on total petroleum consumption.¹

In 2014, the United States consumed a total of 6.95 billion barrels of petroleum products, an average of 19.05 million barrels per day.² This total includes about 0.34 billion barrels of biofuels.

¹ EIA uses product supplied as a proxy for U.S. petroleum consumption. Product supplied measures the disappearance of these products from primary sources, for example, refineries, natural gas processing plants, blending plants, pipelines, and bulk terminals.

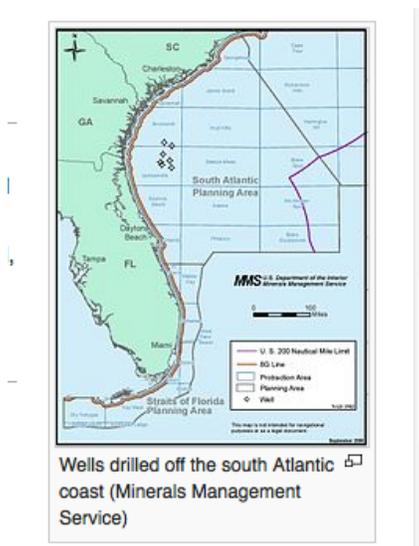
² Preliminary data for 2014.

<http://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.cfm?id=33&t=6>

Furthermore, there have been many failed attempts at drilling the Outer Continental Shelf. Is it any wonder?

Offshore drilling on the US Atlantic coast for oil and gas took place from 1947 to the early 1980s. Oil companies drilled 5 wells in Atlantic Florida state waters and 51 exploratory wells on federal leases on the outer continental shelf of the Atlantic coast. None of the wells were completed as producing wells. All the leases have now reverted to the government.... http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offshore_drilling_on_the_US_Atlantic_coast

Southern Atlantic Coast



The first lease sale in the Southeast Georgia Embayment off the coast of [Georgia](#) and [Florida](#) was held in 1978.^[22] Oil companies drilled seven wells, all dry holes.^[23]

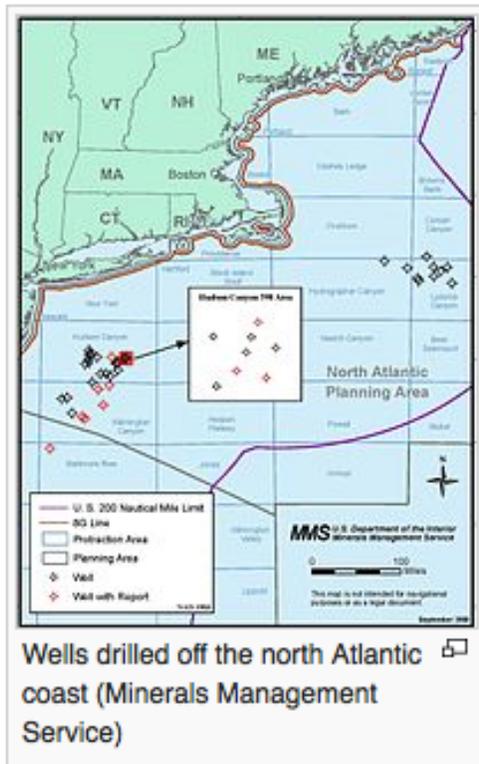
Middle Atlantic coast[



A number of oil companies bought federal leases offshore [North Carolina](#), but in 1990 the US Secretary of Commerce denied [Mobil Oil](#) permission to drill after Congress passed the North Carolina [Outer Banks](#) Protection Act, prohibiting leasing and drilling on federal seabed offshore from North Carolina. Mobil and [Marathon Oil](#) sued the federal government to recover money paid for the leases. The US Supreme Court ruled for the oil companies in June 2000, and ordered the federal government to repay \$158 million. The government paid, and the companies relinquished the leases.^[24] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offshore_drilling_on_the_US_Atlantic_coast

Does today's political climate ensure that the same objections to the lease sales will not prevail in a legal setting, thwarting the plan on the basis of application of existing environmental laws? Environmental laws were established to protect the environment, not to be dismissed when the oil industry beckons.

North Atlantic coast[



About 30 wells explored the Baltimore Canyon Trough, about 100 miles (160 km) off the coast of [New Jersey](#), [Maryland](#), and [Virginia](#).^[25] In one area, five wells tested significant flows of gas from [Jurassic](#) rocks, at rates as high as 18.9 million cubic feet per day. A 3-dimensional [seismic survey](#) was made over the area, but, in part due to falling gas prices in the 1980s, the lessee oil companies concluded that the tracts were uneconomic. The last leases were relinquished in 1984.^[26] From 1976 though 1982, oil companies drilled ten exploratory wells in the US portion of the [Georges Bank](#) Basin, about 120 miles (190 km) off the coast of [Massachusetts](#). The deepest well had a total depth of 21,874 feet (6,667 m).^[27] None was successful.^[28] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Offshore_drilling_on_the_US_Atlantic_coast

More wasted effort, more economic folly. Even as today we witness a surge in demand for renewables, oil and gas prices have dropped dramatically:

Last year's 33 percent drop in gasoline prices already has automakers laying the groundwork to challenge more stringent fuel economy targets for new cars. The oil industry says a decline in its oil revenue means it can't afford new climate regulations. Even solar-equipment makers are seeing share prices fall on fears inexpensive natural gas will erode demand. <http://www.autonews.com/article/20150128/OEM01/150129810/oil-price-drop-may-threaten-to-undercut-obamas-clean-energy-legacy>

If demand for cheap oil and gas is falling with strong growth in renewables, why do we need to venture into a high risk, unproven activity that can lead to massive coastal, environmental and economic destruction? Today, after the drop in oil prices 33% in just one year (2014), oil is now hovering at ~\$2.00 per gallon, hardly making a strong case for such extreme and reckless drilling program. (The 52-week low for oil per barrel is at \$46.18.)

“We are awash in cheap fossil fuels in a way that was unimaginable five years ago,” said Michael Greenstone, an economics professor at the University of Chicago who was once the chief economist for Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers.” Ibid.

After the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, President Obama halted the one offshore drilling lease sale that had moved forward in Virginia, vowing to protect our coasts from a similar disaster. But since that time, despite political hype and oil industry slick-talk there have been

1. No new rules or regulations governing oil spills;
2. No new spill response technologies;
3. No assurances of code and safety rules enforcement;
4. No decisive measures to protect the environment or the human victims of the tragedies of oil spills...

Recently, the EPA made another half-hearted attempt to appear genuinely responsive to the brutal destruction witnessed during the BP Deepwater Horizon blowout.

The EPA claims their new rules will incorporate part of [what officials learned](#) during BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster, including toxicity testing requirements, information that manufacturers must provide the EPA and the public, and how toxicity must be monitored while the chemicals are used on future spills. Mathy Stanislaus, who oversees the EPA's emergency response policies, [stated](#): "Our proposed amendments incorporate scientific advances and lessons learned from the application of spill-mitigating substances in response to oil discharges and will help ensure that the emergency planners and responders are well-equipped to protect human health and the environment."

But several scientists and doctors took issue with the EPA's claims, stating that the agency has not gone nearly far enough in protecting people, wildlife and the environment from dispersants that they described as "deadly," "cancer-causing," "extremely toxic," and that "wreak havoc on people's bodies."

Human Health Impacts

During a January 14 webinar co-hosted by the Government Accountability Project (GAP) and A Locally Empowered Response Team (ALERT), experts in several areas painted a grim picture of the profound effects of the dispersants on the environment, wildlife and humans, as well as their ongoing human health and environmental impacts in the Gulf of Mexico since the BP crisis.

out.org/news/item/28623-scientists-and-doctors-sound-alarm-over-health-dangers-of-oil-spill-dispersants

One can only state that governing agencies, the EPA, Interior Dept., BOEM appear to have little interest in public welfare when it comes to policing the oil industry. One example: while the public and environment continues to suffer, the industry touts its dispersant contains "trade secret" ingredients. Despite victims' continued anguish, regulators still have made no attempts to force disclosure in order to treat those affected. This brings the EPA, BOEM and Interior Dept. into complicity with an oil industry collusion and coverup which just gets bigger every time you look in a new direction.

Robert Mathis, an M.D. and doctor of environmental medicine in Santa Barbara, California, described how several of the chemical ingredients of the dispersants that are regularly used on oil spills remain unknown because they are "trade secrets," but that even the known chemicals in the dispersant cocktails are extremely dangerous to humans; they contain an "emulsifier that allows chemicals deeper penetration into tissues and cells."

"Dispersants disrupt both bacterial and human cell membranes," Mathis explained. "Damage disrupts cell functions, leading to cell failure, and may cause cancers and death. All living things are damaged, including groundwater."

Mathis described in detail how, by using the toxic dispersants, oil companies and cleanup crews "give the chemicals access to cellular machinery by breaking down the lipid cell membrane." *ibid.*

The patterns of behavior that were unmasked by the BP Deepwater Horizon present a scathing testament to the culture of deception and an utter disregard for public health and environmental safety and law pervasive in the oil industry. This bodes poorly and prompts quick and decisive negative response to plans that place the east coast of the US at risk.

Halliburton and Transocean, found guilty of gross negligence in the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, are industry contractors that work throughout the worldwide industry. These contractors will not be banned from working on the east coast leases; neither will be BP for that matter.

Halliburton Company [/ˈhælɪbɜːrtən/](#) is an American multinational corporation, and one of the world's largest^[8] [oil field](#) services companies with operations in more than 80 countries. It owns hundreds of subsidiaries, affiliates, branches, brands, and divisions worldwide and employs approximately 100,000 people.^[7] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transocean>

Transocean Ltd. is one of the world's largest [offshore drilling](#) contractors. The Swiss-based company rents floating mobile [drill rigs](#), along with the equipment and personnel for operations, to oil and gas companies at an average daily rate of US\$282,700 (2010).^[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transocean>

BP was cited over 700 times by OSHA for safety violations before the BP oil spill disaster, yet they continued operations, business as usual! There is no reason to believe these key oil industry players would comply with regulations and hold public health and safety as the priority. Why would they start conforming to rules and law, after decades of this historical behavior? We don't believe that safe and non-polluting oil exploration or drilling is possible. When profits are at stake, speed trumps safety, which along with gross negligence and blatant non-compliance with environmental laws, is what led to the largest oil spill in US history.

This operational culture of the oil-industry exercising control over governing agencies bodes poorly for workers, for the public, and for the areas to be impacted by this lease plan.

Drilling safety is critical to the lives of oil and gas workers, the prosperity of local economies and preservation of the environment.

More than three years have passed since the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion, a tragedy that killed 11 men and sent more than 4 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, causing one of the worst environmental disasters in United States history. Yet, the Republican Congress has not enacted a single law to improve the safety of offshore drilling and continues to block commonsense safety reforms. This is unacceptable. In January 2011, the independent, bi-partisan National Commission on the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling released their in-depth findings on the BP disaster. The report made a number of important safety recommendations. These recommendations have since been turned into legislation.

However, the Republican Majority has blocked this legislation and instead repeatedly passed bills through the House that would expand offshore drilling off of states such as Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, California and Alaska without putting any new safety standards in place.

Committee Democrats continue to monitor safety of drilling operations onshore and offshore. Recently, Shell Oil rushed to drill offshore in the Arctic. Cutting corners to skirt regulations, their 30 year-old arctic drilling platform, the Kulluk, lost control and beached on pristine Alaskan coastline. Committee Democrats investigated the matter and found Shell moved the rig in dangerous conditions, possibly motivated by a desire to avoid paying millions in taxes.

The push for speed over safety is what led to disaster in the first place. Congress owes it to the families of the rig workers who lost their lives on the Deepwater Horizon and those currently working in the industry to ensure that accidents like the BP spill never happen again. <http://democrats.naturalresources.house.gov/issue/bp-oil-spill>

Perhaps most disheartening about this project is the destruction that is likely if this lease plan does proceed:

“Opening Atlantic waters to offshore drilling would take us in exactly the wrong direction,” said Bob Deans, a spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council. “It would ignore the lessons of the disastrous BP blowout, the need to protect future generations from the dangers of climate change and the promise of a clean-energy future.”

“The BP blowout oiled a thousand miles of coastline, about the distance from Savannah to Boston,” Mr. Deans said. “Opening up part of the Atlantic to drilling could expose the entire Eastern Seaboard to the risks of a catastrophic blowout.” http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/us/politics/white-house-to-propose-allowing-oil-drilling-off-atlantic-coast.html?_r=0

Would we see a repeat of the BP disaster along our eastern shores? We should not have to ponder this question. Since the Interior Department’s announcement that it would open the mid and south Atlantic coasts to oil and gas exploration, a coalition of 75 scientists called on President Obama to reject the plan outright.

“Opening the U.S. east coast to seismic airgun exploration poses an unacceptable risk of serious harm to marine life at the species and population levels, the full extent of which will not be understood until long after the harm occurs. Mitigating such impacts requires a much better understanding of cumulative effects, which have not properly been assessed, as well as strict, highly precautionary limits on the amounts of annual and concurrent survey activities, which have not been prescribed. To proceed otherwise is simply not sustainable.” http://docs.nrdc.org/wildlife/files/wil_15030401a.pdf

The scientific community dismissed the assessment of negligible impact on marine animals as not based on sound science. Before any drilling will take place, airgun arrays will assault the environment, with the very real potential of catastrophic impacts on marine fauna:

“Airgun surveys have an enormous environmental footprint. For blue and other endangered great whales, for example, such surveys have been shown to disrupt activities essential to foraging and reproduction over vast ocean areas. Additionally, surveys could increase the risk of calves being separated from their mothers, the effects of which can be lethal, and, over time, cause chronic behavioral and physiological stress, suppressing reproduction and increasing mortality and morbidity. The Interior Department itself has estimated that seismic exploration would disrupt vital marine mammal behavior more than 13 million times over the initial six-to-seven years, and there are good reasons to consider this number a significant underestimate.

The impacts of airguns extend beyond marine mammals to all marine life. Many other marine animals respond to sound, and their ability to hear other animals and acoustic cues in their environment are critical to survival. Seismic surveys

have been shown to displace commercial species of fish, with the effect in some fisheries of dramatically depressing catch rates. Airguns can also cause mortality in fish eggs and larvae, induce hearing loss and physiological stress, interfere with adult breeding calls, and degrade anti-predator response: raising concerns about potentially massive impacts on fish populations. In some species of invertebrates, such as scallops, airgun shots and other low-frequency noises have been shown to interfere with larval or embryonic development. And threatened and endangered sea turtles, although almost completely unstudied for their vulnerability to noise impacts, have their most sensitive hearing in the same low frequencies in which most airgun energy is concentrated.” (ibid)

With such little oil to recover, with the history of drilling failures, with inevitable impacts of seismic pre-drilling and operational leaks and routine discharges, and with no progress in safety technology or oversight regulations since the worst oil spill disaster in US history, this lease plan must be shelved, for good.

Please do not further this lease plan or give it justification by preparing an EIS.

Sincerely,

Taffy Williams, President