

President Biden to pause leasing for new offshore drilling

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Pacific Northwest marine advocates are celebrating the recent announcement from the Biden administration to pause oil and gas leasing on federal lands and waters.

Advocates with the Protect the Pacific Coalition cite the need to protect the U.S. coastal economy from the risks of oil spills, the growing urgency of addressing the climate crisis, and the potential for healthy oceans to serve as a powerful climate solution.

"Offshore drilling is a dirty and dangerous practice that pollutes the ocean, threatens coastal communities, and exacerbates climate change," said Pete Stauffer, Environmental Director of the Surfrider Foundation.

"We applaud today's historic action by the Biden administration and call on Congress to permanently protect all U.S. coastlines from oil and gas development."

The Trump Administration's initial proposal from January 2018 would have opened Oregon and other coastal states to new offshore oil and gas leases for the first time in more than 30 years, which sparked a bipartisan wave of opposition up and down the Pacific coast and around the country.

“Clean beaches and a healthy ocean are critical drivers of our coastal economies, supporting over 2.6 million jobs and generating roughly \$180 billion in GDP,” said Vipe Desai, founding member of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast (BAPPC). “Coastal businesses are already reeling from the pandemic and need reassurances that we won’t be dealing with oil spills in the future. The only way to guarantee that is to put the Trump vision for our coasts behind us and move forward with no new leasing.”

BAPPC represents a broad range of industries--technology, tourism, seafood, real estate, and local chambers of commerce, among others--united in a shared belief that a healthy coast is vital to their bottom lines, as well as the lifestyles of their customers and staff. They recently joined their counterparts on the Atlantic Coast in a letter to the Biden administration about the importance of ending offshore drilling and advancing renewable energy.

A healthy ocean is a major economic engine for Oregon’s coastal communities. Beyond the many fishing-related jobs, this includes small business owners who operate bed and breakfasts, restaurants, whale watching charters, and rentals for recreational equipment such as kayaks, surfboards, diving equipment, among others. A 2011 study by NaturalEquity, Surfrider, and Ecotrust found that coastal recreation alone generates \$2.4 billion per year.

“We welcome this bold action,” said Richard Charter, Senior Fellow of the Ocean Foundation. “The Biden administration clearly understands the necessity of ultimately enacting permanent protection from dangerous offshore drilling to help address the climate crisis and to protect our nation’s sensitive fisheries and vital coastal economies.”

No new oil leases have been offered off the Pacific coast since 1984, but the federal proposal called for seven from 2019 to 2024. The proposal met with immediate, bipartisan opposition, with state and local leaders around the country urging the federal government to protect the millions of jobs and businesses that rely on a healthy ocean.

In Oregon, the cities of Port Orford, Newport, Lincoln City, Toledo, Yachats, and Gold Beach passed resolutions opposing the 2018 Trump Administration proposal. The Siletz Tribal Council and Ports of Toledo and Newport also passed resolutions.

In 2019 the Oregon state legislature passed legislation to protect Oregon’s coastal businesses and residents from the devastating impacts of an oil spill, by ensuring oil and gas drilling would never happen off the coast. The legislation repealed the sunset on the moratorium on oil, gas and sulfur leasing in Oregon’s territorial sea, and prohibited the Oregon Department of State Lands from leasing any of the submerged and submersible lands within the territorial sea for the exploration, development or production of oil, gas or sulfur in the territorial sea; or activities in furtherance of the exploration, development or production of oil, gas or sulfur within federal waters adjacent to the territorial sea.

Oregon’s coastal business owners and citizens point to the long-term impacts from the oil spills of Exxon Valdez, Deepwater Horizon and the New Carissa spill on fisheries and businesses. Citing data from NOAA that shows the agency responds to 100 oil spills in U.S. waters every year, the group urged a pivot to a clean

energy economy that protects Oregon's coastal communities alongside valuable marine and other natural resources.

"President Biden has an incredible opportunity to act on climate change and protect our coasts once and for all by closing the chapter on future offshore oil leasing," said Diane Hoskins, Campaign Director of Oceana. "If enacted, President Biden's campaign commitments to tackle the climate crisis and protect our waters from new offshore oil drilling will ensure we build back better, keep coastal economies safe from oil disasters and support a transition to clean, renewable energy."