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### **Politics trump science in latest Obama decision on Arctic Ocean drilling**

*Record of decision affirms Chukchi Lease Sale 193, despite missing science and lack of oil spill response*

The following statement is made on behalf of the above-listed groups:

“The Obama administration’s decision to affirm Chukchi Lease Sale 193 in America’s Arctic Ocean is a clear case of politics trumping science. The Obama administration inherited the deeply flawed 2008 lease sale from the Bush administration. But in July 2010, a federal district court in Alaska ruled that the federal government had unlawfully failed to address the absence of basic scientific data in the Arctic Ocean in the lease sale’s environmental analyses. The court directed the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) to revise the analyses and reconsider the lease sale decision.

Today’s decision to affirm the lease sale—instead of requiring that important scientific information be gathered and proven methods for cleaning up an Arctic oil spill be developed before opening the Chukchi Sea to oil and gas companies—shows that the Obama administration has backed away from its stated commitment to make decisions ‘based on sound science and the public interest, and not on the special interests.’

The decision today is not consistent with a recent report from top scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey, which confirmed that there is enough important missing information about the Arctic’s unique marine environment that it presents a ‘major constraint to a defensible science framework



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for critical Arctic decision making.’ Despite the fact that this report was specifically commissioned by the Secretary of the Interior to guide offshore oil drilling decisions in the Arctic Ocean, BOEMRE dismissed the report as largely ‘beyond the scope of the BOEMRE mission’ and determined that no missing information is essential to the decision to open the Chukchi Sea to oil drilling.

What’s more, if an oil spill were to happen in the Arctic’s extreme, remote conditions, there is no proven method and almost no resources available to clean it up. This fact has been affirmed by administration officials themselves. To quote BOEMRE Director Michael Bromwich, ‘spill response is a question.’ Similarly, Admiral Robert Papp, the top officer at the U.S. Coast Guard, recently told Congress that if the Deepwater Horizon disaster ‘were to happen off the North Slope of Alaska, we’d have nothing. We’re starting from ground zero today.’

America’s Arctic Ocean is home to many of our nation’s most beloved species of wildlife including polar bears, ice seals, walrus, beluga whales and more. It is also known as the ‘garden’ to the Inupiat people of Alaska’s Arctic coast. Royal Dutch Shell hopes to proceed with risky, aggressive plans to drill six wells in the Arctic’s Chukchi Sea beginning next summer. As the Obama administration reviews Shell’s drilling proposal, which includes woefully inadequate spill response plans, the question we pose is this: Are you willing to spoil our Arctic Ocean for political gain?”

#### Chukchi Lease Sale 193 timeline

September 2005: Bush Administration moves to lease Chukchi Sea for first time since 1991

February 2008: Royal Dutch Shell and other oil companies paid \$2.1 billion to lease 2.76 million acres of Chukchi Sea waters.

March 2010: Obama administration cancels all future lease sales in the Arctic Ocean through 2012, citing a lack of information to support moving forward there, but keeps Chukchi Lease Sale 193 intact.

July 2010: An Alaska district court rules that the environmental analysis for Lease Sale 193 is inadequate and directs the federal government to redo its analysis of data gaps and reconsider the leasing decision.

October 12, 2010: Just a few months after the court’s ruling, BOEMRE releases a draft supplemental EIS (SEIS) that appears designed to justify the earlier decision to hold Lease Sale 193. The draft SEIS states that none of the missing information is essential to a reasoned choice about whether and how to lease, and thereby declines to gather any of the information.

May 25, 2011: BOEMRE releases a second draft of a court-ordered redo of the environmental analysis for Lease Sale 193. Once again, the agency acknowledges hundreds of instances where it lacks scientific information about the Arctic Ocean – such as the migration patterns of whales and habitat use of walruses, beluga, fish and other species – but determines that this information is not



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necessary to make decisions about opening areas for drilling. BOEMRE's second SEIS also acknowledges, for the first time, that a very large oil spill on the order of magnitude of the Deepwater Horizon spill could occur in the Chukchi Sea. Such a blowout could spill over 2 million barrels of oil and could flow for 74 days before it is stopped, according to BOEMRE.

August 18, 2011: BOEMRE releases a final draft SEIS that once again fails to meaningfully address crucial gaps in information and summarily dismisses the government's own science experts' report on missing information.

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