

Arctic Ocean Offshore Development 101

America's Arctic Ocean and surrounding coasts are a national treasure. Today our wild Arctic is at risk of being lost to dangerous oil drilling. The Arctic's Chukchi and Beaufort Seas are home to many of our nation's most beloved wildlife species—polar bears, walrus, ice seals, bowhead whales, beluga whales and more—and these Arctic waters are the “garden” for Alaska Natives who have thrived off their bounty for thousands of years.

Over the past decade, the Department of the Interior has invested heavily in providing industry an opportunity to pursue oil and gas in the Arctic Ocean.

This push toward development has resulted in controversy. What's more, Shell's myriad problems in 2012 validated concerns about industry's ability to operate safely in the Arctic Ocean. Since 2012, Shell's drilling attempts have been hampered by a total lack of preparedness and major risks, including its drill rig running aground, an engine fire, and more than \$1 million in fines for clean air violations. On January 22, 2014, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Department of the Interior had violated the law in deciding to hold Chukchi Sea Lease Sale 193. All areas that are currently leased in the Chukchi Sea fall under this lease sale, including those leases on which Shell has been attempting to move forward with development that has been mired in problems for years. In light of the uncertainty brought on by the Court's decision and the fact that its operation is still under investigation for last year's foibles, Shell recently announced that it would not pursue its 2014 exploration plans. Shell's experiences should be a cautionary tale as decisions are made about whether to authorize these activities in the future.

Climate Change Impacts

The Arctic Ocean is known as the “least studied and most poorly understood area on Earth” (U.S. Arctic Research Commission). There is a lack of basic science about the Arctic's marine environment – from simple species counts of fish and marine mammals to information about currents and tidal systems. What's more, the Arctic is experiencing the effects of climate change at twice the rate of the rest of the world, and because the polar ice cap functions as the air conditioner for the entire Northern Hemisphere, what impacts the Arctic has an impact on the rest of the world. Loss of sea ice cover in the fall has already been linked to sea level rise and extreme weather patterns all over the country. Exploiting reserves in the Arctic Ocean has the potential to release an additional 15.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere when burned – equivalent to the emissions from all U.S. transportation modes in the U.S. over a 9 year time period. No place has potentially more to lose as a result of development than America's Arctic Ocean.

No technology to clean up an oil spill in sea ice

An oil spill in the Arctic Ocean would not only be impossible to clean up, but it also would likely become an environmental catastrophe. During the winter months, these Arctic seas are covered by sea ice sheets up to 25-foot thick and are extremely difficult to navigate. If a spill started as winter ice sets in, it would be impossible to reach the oil – which means that oil would continue to gush into the sea and under the ice for up to eight months.

The Arctic Ocean is prone to hurricane-force storms, 20-foot swells, sub-zero temperatures and months of darkness. There is no proven way to clean up an oil spill in these extreme conditions. What's more, the



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Arctic has extremely limited infrastructure (there are no roads or deep water ports and only a handful of small airports) and the nearest Coast Guard station is 1,000 miles away.

The Bottom Line:

President Obama cannot allow drilling in the Arctic Ocean. Shell's long list of setbacks and failures – coupled with the extreme risk for oil spills and further climate destruction in an already fragile ecosystem – provides overwhelming evidence that the oil and gas industry is not prepared to operate safely in the Arctic Ocean. President Obama should prioritize protecting the Arctic Ocean and not approve any further offshore drilling in the region.

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March 2014