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New Obama administration draft report highlights risks of Arctic Ocean drilling

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Obama administration today issued a new draft analysis of the effects of oil and gas leasing in the Chukchi Sea, part of America's Arctic Ocean, that demonstrates how risky it would be to allow drilling in this remote, irreplaceable and climate-stressed region.

Last January, the Ninth Circuit Court declared the Chukchi Lease Sale 193 unlawful, requiring the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to redo the analysis of environmental effects of drilling in the sea and reconsider whether the region should be open to drilling at all. This is the second time the massive offshore oil and gas sale, which was rushed through based on poor science and arbitrary economic assumptions, has been sent back by the courts. It was originally held in 2008, sent back the first time by the Alaska District Court in 2010, unsuccessfully defended in 2011 by the Obama administration, and sent back again by the Ninth Circuit Court in January. The court in January found that the previous environmental impact statement for the sale arbitrarily analyzed "only the best case scenario for environmental harm," severely underestimating the risks of a large oil spill and other effects if the leases were developed. Today's draft supplemental environmental impact statement is the agency's first step in reconsidering the lease sale per the court's order.

The draft supplemental EIS released today contains a revised prediction of the level of oil industry activities that could occur as a result of the lease sale. Groups have just begun to review the draft, but it shows the effects of leasing in the Chukchi Sea could be catastrophic. For example, under its new analysis, Interior acknowledges that there is a 75 percent chance that one or more large oil spills (more than 1,000 barrels, or 42,000 gallons, of oil) would occur if the leases are developed. There is no way effectively to clean up or contain an oil spill in Arctic Ocean conditions.

Millions of Americans have asked the Obama administration to stop drilling in the Arctic Ocean based on these poor analyses and decisions. Arctic drilling is far too risky—proven by Shell's disastrous 2012 program that involved near-misses, fires, investigations, pollution violations, and fines, and ended with its drilling rig grounded near Kodiak, Alaska. Scientists from around the world have expressed concern for this vulnerable region—the Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world, which is wreaking havoc on the unique wildlife and Alaska Native communities that depend on the ocean. Drilling can only make this situation worse, adding insult to injury by risking the most climate-stressed region on Earth to explore for oil that will only fuel further warming.

For more information on our work, go to [United for America's Arctic](#).

Quotes by Groups:

"The courts have twice sent back this ill-advised decision to open the Chukchi Sea to dirty oil drilling. Today's draft impact statement confirms again that drilling in the Chukchi Sea puts Arctic people and

wildlife at risk from major oil spills that could not be cleaned or contained, it also puts the climate at risk. Drilling for more oil in the rapidly melting Arctic Ocean adds climate insult to climate injury,” said **Earthjustice Staff Attorney Erik Grafe**. “The lease sale decision is a golden opportunity for the Obama administration to show climate leadership by deciding to keep the Chukchi Sea off limits to drilling.”

“America’s Arctic is no place for risky and reckless drilling,” said **Cindy Shogan, Executive Director for Alaska Wilderness League**. “After examining all of the impacts of Lease Sale 193, the Obama administration should conclude that no leasing should proceed in the Chukchi Sea. In 2012, the nation was transfixed as Shell crashed its Arctic drilling rig into Sitkalidak Island, Alaska proving that no oil company should be drilling in Arctic conditions. It is time for the Obama administration to protect America’s Arctic Ocean. It is unsafe, dangerous and irresponsible to drill there.”

“The Arctic Ocean is an incredible resource that supports strong wildlife and bird communities, including globally-significant Important Bird Areas, that cannot be protected in the case of an oil spill. It’s disappointing to see BOEM seemingly rush an analysis out just so Shell can follow-up its disastrous 2012 Arctic Ocean drilling season with another effort that endangers the birds and wildlife of the Arctic,” said **Jim Adams, Policy Director for Audubon Alaska**.

“As the climate crisis unfolds, walrus are cramming themselves onto Alaska beaches by the tens of thousands and polar bears are starving. Adding noisy drillships and the risk of oil spills to the rapidly melting Arctic is a recipe for disaster. If President Obama is serious about his climate legacy he’ll put a stop to dangerous fuel development in America’s Arctic Ocean,” said **Rebecca Noblin, Alaska Director, Center for Biological Diversity**.

“There’s no such thing as safe oil exploration, drilling and transport - there will be spills. As we represent community members, Natives, fishermen and families still impacted by the devastation of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, do hear us as we say NO to drilling in the Chukchi Sea,” said **Dune Lankard, Eyak Preservation Council**.

“Instead of exposing one of the world’s most pristine ocean ecosystems to industrial-scale fossil fuel development, the Administration must seize this opportunity to quickly and clearly shift away from any drilling for oil in the Arctic Ocean,” said **Chuck Clusen, Director, National Parks and Alaska Projects, Natural Resources Defense Council**.

“The third time is not the charm,” **Susan Murray, Deputy Vice President, Pacific for Oceana**. “The American people deserve more than another attempt to justify a poorly planned and evaluated lease sale. As Shell has demonstrated, companies are not ready to operate safely in the Arctic Ocean. Our government has no business selling leases there.”

“The Chukchi Sea provides important habitat for many special animals, including walrus, bowhead whales, seals, polar bears and migratory birds. Drilling for oil and gas in this vulnerable region could have enormous impacts—and there’s no proven way to clean up a major oil spill in these waters,” said **Andrew Hartsig, Director of Ocean Conservancy’s Arctic Program**. “Lease Sale 193 should not be affirmed. Instead, the Obama Administration should focus on protecting important marine areas in the Chukchi Sea and other parts of the Arctic Ocean.”

“Whether it will be from an almost inevitable oil spill, or from the unavoidable noises from seismic surveys, vessel and platform stabilization, underwater acoustic communications, seafloor hydrocarbon

processing, and re-injection well compressors; we know that oil and gas operations will disrupt the habitat for Arctic marine life which we know so little about - and upon which we may very well depend. Opening the Arctic to fossil fuel extraction is just plain reckless,” said **Michael Stocker, Director, Ocean Conservation Research.**

“The Arctic’s marine environment is relatively pristine, yet fragile and extremely vulnerable to potential oil impacts. It is clear that the oil industry is not prepared to drill safely in Arctic waters. What’s at stake here is one of the important ecosystems on the planet and food security of indigenous peoples who depend on these Arctic marine waters for sustenance,” said **Kevin Harun, Arctic Program Director, Pacific Environment.**

“America's Arctic Ocean is the last place we should be drilling for oil. The risks to wildlife, to subsistence communities, and to the climate are clear. Equally clear is the need for the U.S. to take a leadership role on climate, especially as it takes over the Arctic Council next year. Real progress on climate requires the administration begin leaving dirty fuels in the ground, starting with the Arctic Ocean,” said **Dan Ritzman, Alaska Program Director for Sierra Club's Our Wild America Campaign.**

“Shell’s disastrous 2012 Arctic Ocean drilling and transport operations demonstrate that even technically advanced and well-resourced companies are no match for Arctic conditions and the challenges of getting to and from there,” said **Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska Regional Director for The Wilderness Society.** “The Obama administration should reconsider moving forward with offshore drilling in the Arctic Ocean, particularly in light of climate change and the administration’s aim to reduce carbon emissions.”

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