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Alaska Wilderness League applauds cancellation of 2016/17 Arctic Ocean lease sales; denial of lease extensions

WASHINGTON – Today the U.S. Department of the Interior announced it is canceling federal lease sales for the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas in 2016 and 2017. The Interior Department also announced that it has formally rejected bids by Statoil and Shell for extensions on their existing Arctic leases.

Statement by Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League

“This is great news for the Arctic and our climate future. President Obama has made it clear that drilling has no place in America’s Arctic Ocean. The president understands the risks of drilling in such a remote and dangerous ecosystem, as well as the dangers of climate change and that drilling in the Arctic Ocean will only make it worse.

This summer President Obama saw firsthand the raw wildness and beauty of Alaska, and the effects that climate change is having across the state. We applaud him for heeding the warning signs and putting the brakes on further Arctic drilling and development.

Any drilling is risky business, but the risks in the Arctic Ocean are particularly great. The Arctic is prone to hurricane-force storms, 20-foot swells, pervasive sea ice, frigid temperatures and months-long darkness. There is no proven way to clean up an oil spill in these extreme conditions. Shell’s Arctic exploits have proven that the oil industry cannot be trusted in America’s Arctic.

The Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the planet, sea ice continues to decline, and Arctic waters are quickly becoming more acidic. One powerful way we can slow the effects of climate change is to limit the amount of fossil fuels we are burning, and an effective way to do that is by not opening up new areas to intensive drilling.”

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