

THE FACTS BEHIND ATLANTIC OFFSHORE DRILLING

Southern Environmental Law Center

The Southeast Rejects Offshore Drilling

- The prospect of opening the Atlantic to offshore drilling has resulted in intense opposition along the Southeast coast with over 250 East Coast local governments passing resolutions against drilling, joining state leaders and hundreds of businesses voicing their opposition to Atlantic offshore drilling and seismic testing.
- Governors on both sides of the aisle, including [Gov. Roy Cooper](#), [Gov. Ralph Northam](#), [Gov. Brian Kemp](#), and [Gov. Henry McMaster](#), have spoken out against drilling off their coastlines.
- The U.S. Navy has said offshore drilling could disrupt training, put military readiness at risk, and interfere with Navy and NASA operations off Virginia's coast, weakening a significant sector of the state's economy.

Drilling Threatens the Southeast's Economy

- Drilling and the intensive industrialization and infrastructure that come with it are incompatible with communities along the Southeast coast that depend on tourism.
- In the coastal regions of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia, visitors spent more than \$17 billion in 2018. That supported 163,530 jobs with a payroll of \$4 billion.
- In 2018, commercial fisheries in Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia landed almost \$300 million worth of fish.
- With international demand for oil and gas at an all-time low, and oil prices plummeting amid the global Coronavirus pandemic, pursuing new offshore oil and gas leases makes even less economic sense.

Drilling Would Be Environmentally Devastating

- In a worst-case scenario, a single oil spill from a rig, tanker, or pipeline would devastate the healthy waters and clean beaches that are critical to coastal economies.
- A decade after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, lasting damage from the spill continues as buried oil resurfaces, birds lose key nesting islands, dolphins become sick at higher rates, and fisheries struggle to recover.
- Even routine spills and accidents, like those regularly seen off the [coast of Louisiana](#), would pose environmental and health-related challenges for coastal communities.

The Federal Decision-Making Process

- In January 2018, the Trump administration announced its draft 2019-2024 offshore leasing plan, proposing to open nearly all U.S. waters to offshore drilling, including the Mid and South Atlantic—despite the fact that Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia were removed from a similar plan in 2016 following intense coastal opposition.
- One year later in April 2019, [the Trump administration announced](#) that it was indefinitely delaying its plan to open the Atlantic coast to offshore drilling, until a lawsuit over offshore drilling is resolved. Contradictory follow-up statements from the administration have triggered even more confusion and doubts about the process.
- Although experts have speculated that the next version of the proposal is unlikely to come out before the 2020 election, states and advocacy groups can be expected to oppose any efforts to put Atlantic drilling back on the table.
- Even though leasing decisions are still pending, the administration has already weakened critical safety rules put in place after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, making drilling more dangerous for those who depend on the coast and its fisheries, approved permits for seismic blasting, and proposed to significantly weaken National Environmental Policy Act protections that apply to all stages of the offshore drilling approval process.

