

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 140 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](#), and [Gov. Henry McMaster](#), have requested that their states be omitted from the next five-year leasing plan.
- 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 2012, the [tourism and recreation sector alone supported](#) more than 170,000 jobs and contributed more than \$6 billion to the regional economy. The commercial fishing industry contributed nearly \$1 billion to the region.
- There were nearly 250,000 ocean-related jobs in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia in 2012, and the [ocean economy contributed](#) \$14.6 billion to the economies in the region. The ocean economy provided more than \$7.5 billion in wages in the same year.

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.
- Years 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.
- 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 in 2016 following intense coastal opposition.
- Just two days later, [Interior Secretary Zinke issued a statement](#) explaining he would be removing Florida from consideration due to local opposition and economic concerns, ignoring similar opposition across the Southeast. Contradictory follow-up statements from the administration have triggered even more confusion and doubts about the process.
- Should the administration finalize its 2019-2024 leasing plan based on a flawed legal process, states and advocacy groups can be expected to challenge the resulting leasing plan.
- These decisions come as the administration also plans to [roll back safety rules](#) put in place after the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, making drilling more dangerous for those who depend on the coast and its fisheries.

