

March 9, 2018

Dear BOEM,

I am writing to urge you to exclude New England from any off-shore oil and gas leasing or exploration activities. I am writing on behalf of the Norwalk River Watershed Association which has a network of over 1000 active participants working to protect and improve water quality and wildlife habitat in our 7-town watershed. There is enormous concern in our community about the threats posed by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Draft Proposed 2019-2014 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

We are alarmed at the plans to drill off of our shores because of the threats such activities pose to our marine ecosystems and the fishing and oyster industries tied to them as well as to our beaches and the tourism and recreational industries that rely on them. In our area, the oyster industry brings in a commercial harvest worth \$30 million a year. This figure does not include the value of recreational oyster harvests. In Norwalk 77,000 acres are considered oyster grounds and roughly 600 people are directly involved in harvesting. This number does not include many hundreds more that make up the fringe employment, truck drivers, shippers, inspectors, etc. The kelp industry is a new arrival, with a defined market still emerging. Another new industry underway is a large-scale effort to raise oysters on land through the early larval stages when they are most open to predatory forces (aquaculture) and then releasing them to the wild once they set. All of these industries, established and emerging, involve food products and are predicated on clean water. One instance of contamination will shut down these businesses.

Our organization along with others such as Trout Unlimited and Harbor Watch work tirelessly, engaging hundreds of volunteers every year, to improve water quality in the Norwalk River and Harbor. In 2014 we succeeded in having two sections of the river removed from the Impaired Waterways list by the EPA. The Norwalk River watershed has an un-remediated brownfield and a superfund site, which contaminated drinking water in the 1970s and 1980s, so we know what contamination looks like and how it affects our economy. We look back on the leaders of the past who allowed such environmental and economic devastation to occur and wonder 'what were they thinking?' Today's off-shore oil and gas spills pose far worse threats. We have all seen what oil spills look like and what they do to marine life and beaches and the associated industries.

Offshore oil and gas development in new areas would require seismic surveys, drilling operations, oil transport by tankers, and the installation of platforms, pipelines, and other

infrastructure. Collectively, these activities would significantly damage the environment, marine wildlife, and coastal economies and ways of life even before any spills occur.

The shores off of New England are better suited to wind than oil and gas exploration according to the BOEM experts who presented information in Hartford about this issue last month. In 20 years, more energy could be produced off our coasts by wind than by oil and gas. Renewable energy will provide the jobs our country needs and this is the sort of energy we want! Stop lining the pockets of oil and gas industry executives while keeping the United States energy industry in the past. We need to move forward with renewables to secure jobs, innovation, competitiveness and to protect our planet from climate change.

There is overwhelming opposition to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Draft Proposed 2019-2014 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program in our community. We have worked for 20 years to clean up our rivers, harbor and Long Island Sound, which was exploited by industry for decades. Please don't introduce a new threat. Please don't take us backwards. Let's move forward together.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

Sincerely,

Louise Washer, President
Norwalk River Watershed Association
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