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## **Editorial: Seismic testing: Lots of pain, little gain**

St. Johns County, St. Augustine and the Beach have signed on to resolutions opposing seismic testing in our coastal waters. It's a symbolic gesture for sure, but it points us in the right direction on this issue, which has too many negatives and too few probable positives.

Let's start at the basis for the drilling plan — the big picture. That is the importance of energy independence for our country. And we don't discount that in any way. But by the U.S. Bureau of Energy Management's own estimate, all the recoverable oil and gas in the area of the Atlantic in question — roughly from Delaware to Central Florida — represents just 4 percent of oil and 8 percent of gas resources currently available in U.S. federal waters.

A story in National Geographic magazine reports that the Department of Interior estimates total production of 1.15 billion barrels of oil and 11.8 trillion cubic feet of gas over a period of decades. That number, the magazine reports, would satisfy current U.S. consumption of oil for 61 days. The gas would last two years.

Understand there has never been a successfully operated oil well in this part of the Atlantic. Five offshore wells were drilled in Florida waters between 1946 and 1962. All were abandoned as "dry."

More recently in Cuba, four offshore wells were drilled between 2004 and 2012. All were non-economical and capped.

There's no guarantee that seismic testing will ever lead to oil or gas production off our coast. Moreover, drilling is currently under a moratorium until at least 2017. Why the rush to find oil when you can't pump it?

There's plenty of debate over the potential effects of seismic testing — the gateway to drilling.

There's growing evidence that the testing itself could endanger marine life, as well as economies of Atlantic coastal communities.

Environmentalists have their data and the oil and gas industry has its own. Most of it is based on speculation — effects the seismic testing could have. No one can really be sure. But even the government — ostensibly in the middle of the fray — admits that there's a very real potential for damage. The latest environmental impact statement concludes that there would be "minor to negligible" impact to most wildlife ... with the exception of marine mammals and turtles. That's a pretty big exception, from where we sit. The EIS says it expects "moderate" impact on these. In all, it says 138,000 marine animals could be injured by seismic testing and as many as 13.6 million could have feeding, migration and behavioral patterns disrupted.

Even if these estimates are correct, the long-range effects could be devastating. It's fair to say that complex migration patterns of ocean life are based on the cycle of life, spawning. And if that's interrupted, the damage to stocks generations down the road is difficult to imagine.

Oil industry experts and even our government say that effects of the sonic air guns is minimal outside 300 meters. That's a guess. Here's a fact.

In 2004, scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association found that hydrophones placed in the middle of the ocean to monitor low-frequency earthquakes were recording sounds from seismic airguns 18,600 miles away.

The pros and cons will continue. But it seems increasingly clear that the evidence of the potential harm of seismic testing is stronger than the evidence of Atlantic drilling having any meaningful effect on our energy consumption or independence. It seems much more a matter of greed than need.