

Aiken Standard

Editorial: Settlement by BP must come as stark reminder

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AP File Photo The Deepwater Horizon oil rig burned in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, which killed 11 men and also opened the release of about 172 million gallons of petroleum into the Gulf of Mexico.

BP's record \$18.7 billion settlement last week related to the Gulf Oil Spill should come as another reminder to not get too gung-ho about drilling off South Carolina's coast.

In all, the company, which was responsible for the release of millions of barrels of oil in the Gulf after a 2010 explosion, will incur more than \$40 billion in costs related to the spill. BP has tried to highlight its cleanup efforts aimed at reducing the long-term environmental damage to Gulf beaches and wildlife, but the ecosystem there won't likely recover for decades.

This should be a reminder concerning the need for our country's energy future, especially when it comes to coastal drilling. Last year, the U.S. Department of the Interior recommended seismic testing along the Carolinas, as well as Virginia and potentially down to Florida, to test for the possible oil levels. Each state, including the Palmetto State, faces a dilemma after the agency's decision.

While drilling offshore could mean a boom in jobs, it easily presents dire environmental consequences, as well. While present data about our oil reserves off the coast are largely outdated, an Interior Department estimate in 2010 indicated that about 2 billion barrels could

exist off the Atlantic. It's important to note that such an amount equals only about 100 days of oil at the country's current consumption rate, according to Newsweek.

A large-scale environmental disaster would be too high a price to pay for such a limited supply of energy. Drilling proponents say lower energy prices and greater energy independence could be the result of exploring the Atlantic Coast. Finding sources of domestic energy is positive, and drilling on private lands has thankfully made the U.S. much less dependent on foreign oil. None of that, though, warrants drilling off of South Carolina's coast.

Our lawmakers shouldn't minimize very real environmental concerns, especially in light of the Gulf spill. Our state's natural resources, particularly our beautiful beaches, are viewed as our greatest economic driver through tourism dollars.

Let's not lose sight of protecting that priceless asset merely for short-lived economic benefits.

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