

Oil drilling, seismic testing still a bad idea

The Editorial Board

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- Here we go again.

Grassroots opposition to drilling for oil off the shores of South Carolina was resounding last year. We thought the proposition had gone away. On Friday, [it came back](#) in an executive order signed by President Donald Trump.

We have a new president, but nothing has changed to make this a good idea.

Oil drilling remains a threat to the established economy, and that threat is opposed by governments and citizens up and down the entire Eastern Seaboard. And it offers a pittance in return for South Carolina, while doing virtually nothing for the so-called American oil independence that makes a catchy sound bite.

The executive order, called the America First Offshore Energy Strategy, instructs Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the nation's five-year plan for offshore oil and gas development in federal waters three miles offshore, and to review regulations and permitting for seismic surveys. The five-year plan runs through 2022.

This reverses a stand by President Barack Obama, who changed courses last year and removed the Atlantic coast from the five-year leasing plan.

Yet, nothing has changed. Still, seismic airgun blasting off our coast is horrible for wildlife, scientists say. The threat of oil on our sandy beaches and salt marshes remains real. In fact, it may be worse than we thought. We still have no feel for what industrial land uses onshore would be, or where. And we know of no cash payouts to the state to counterbalance this risk.

What we do know is that opposition should remain deafening from local governments, chambers of commerce, citizens and organizations interested in preserving the natural resources that are the backbone of our coastal economy.

Our local governments in Beaufort County — including Beaufort and Hilton Head Island — are among well more than 100 all along the Atlantic coast to formally oppose offshore oil drilling and/or the associated seismic testing.

Consider this from the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast, which says it represents more than 41,000 businesses and 500,000 commercial fishing families from Maine to Florida:

“Oil and gas exploration and development activities threaten the vibrant coastal environment that supports nearly 1.4 million jobs and contributes \$95 billion to the annual gross domestic product, mainly through tourism, fishing and recreation,” it said in a letter to the Secretary of Interior released on Friday.

“If plans to allow Atlantic drilling move forward, our communities could face chronic oil and chemical leaks, as well as the potential for major spills like the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, on top of the industrialization of shorefronts by infrastructure needed for oil and gas development.”

The S.C. Environmental Law Project based in Georgetown tells why that is such a risk to our neighborhood.

“The Mid and South Atlantic was eliminated from the federal leasing plan for 2017-2022 finalized in November 2016, whereas the Obama administration’s ‘permanent’ ban was limited to certain areas in Alaska and the northern canyons off the coast of New England and the Chesapeake Bay, which were protected ‘due to their critical and irreplaceable ecological value.’

“Whatever South Carolina’s offshore seabed is lacking compared to those northern canyons, its coastal treasures more than make up for it: the Santee

River Delta, the unique estuarine habitats of the ACE Basin and Winyah Bay, and the Cape Romain Wildlife Refuge, to name a few.”

The change in plans puts Americans at risk, rather than first.

<http://www.islandpacket.com/opinion/editorials/article147397714.html>