



**MARTIN COUNTY**  
**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**  
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County Administrator

**MICHAEL D. DURHAM**  
County Attorney

July 30, 2014

Ms. Kelly Hammerle,  
Five Year Program Manager  
BOEM (HM-3120)  
381 Elden Street  
Herndon, Virginia 20170

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information and comment on the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) preparation of the 2017–2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program. While the Martin County Board of County Commissioners is aware of the interest in additional energy development, I cannot overstate our concern about the effects that oil and gas exploration, as well as any subsequent deepwater drilling, could have on the ecosystem, tourism, and economy of communities along the Atlantic coast.

Martin County is located in the Treasure Coast region of Southeast Florida, immediately north of Palm Beach County, and has a population of 146,318. Martin County's economy, natural ecosystems and lifestyle are tied to our waterways. The St. Lucie Federal Navigation Inlet provides a conduit between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River Lagoon, the most biodiverse estuary in North America, and a lagoon of national significance and supported by the National Estuary Program. This ecosystem provide habitat for over 4,300 species of plants and animals, including more than 30 threatened and endangered species such as Manatee, wood stork, sand hill crane, and peregrine falcon. The health of these valuable resources depends on flushing of clean ocean water through the St. Lucie Inlet. The offshore waters contain the coral reefs at the northern end of the Florida Reef tract which provide vital ecosystem services to a valuable and thriving fishery, the economic basis for our commercial, sport and recreational fishing industry. These reefs also serve as protection to coastal beaches. Martin County works with the US Army Corps of Engineers to actively manage our beaches, by identifying suitable offshore sand deposits that can furnish sand to over 4 miles of the County's beaches.

Our waterways are already faced with significant threats, including impaired water quality from excess nutrients, extreme freshwater inflows, and invasive species. Surface waters of the northeast Everglades naturally flowed south to the Everglades, west to Lake Okeechobee and east to the Indian River Lagoon. Projects constructed in the 1950s diverted surface waters into canals and into the St. Lucie Estuary and the Indian River Lagoon. As a result, billions of gallons of freshwater are wasted daily to the Atlantic Ocean. During large surface water discharge events, the water quality of the lagoon and surrounding estuary are severely impacted, harming aquatic plants and animals, and requiring restrictions for human contact. Martin County is vigilant in its desire to improve our waterways, and has strong environmental regulations and has partnered with the federal and state government as a leader in restoration and conservation. Martin County citizens have taxed themselves eight out of the past 10 years, generating \$75M to support Everglades restoration and water quality. We acquired 45,000

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acres for various CERP projects that include the restoration of upland and wetland ecosystems. Since 2000 Martin County has invested \$50+ million in 25 stormwater projects serving over 6,000 acres. We've restored 28 acres of oyster habitat in the St. Lucie Estuary.

Martin County's natural resources, water quality, endangered species, coral reefs, economic drivers such as marine industry and tourism, lifestyle of the residents, valuable sand resources (as yet unknown), and other efforts to develop other off-shore energy sources in our region could be jeopardized by offshore drilling, harming an already extremely fragile ecosystem.

The Martin County Board of County Commissioners is opposed to oil and gas exploration off the Atlantic Coast of Florida. We are also extremely concerned over the proposed use of airgun testing due to the potentially harmful effects the process has on marine life. In addition to the negative impacts this could have on the ecosystem, airgun testing could also adversely affect activities such as commercial and recreational fishing. The resulting drop in regional tourism could devastate the economies of the local communities.

We would also like to reiterate our concerns about the potential for deepwater drilling should exploration occur, and testing indicate the presence of oil and gas. As you know, deepwater drilling brought us the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico four years ago. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill caused the County expense and significant concerns while located hundreds of miles away.

Martin County is opposed to any offshore resource harvesting that may pose a risk to our environment and economy.

In November of last year, the Administration reported that U.S. oil production hit a 24 year high and for the first time in nearly two decades was producing more oil than it was importing from foreign countries. Additionally, when one also factors in improved vehicle fuel economy standards and the continuing development of new or improved alternative clean energy sources, we see no reason to open up any new areas for potential drilling in the 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide our perspective on the preparation of the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program. Should you have any questions, or need any additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Sarah Heard, Chair  
Martin County Board of County Commissioners  
SH/kp

C: Honorable Members of the Martin County Board of County Commissioners  
Taryn Kryzda, County Administrator  
Kathy Fitzpatrick, Coastal Engineer