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## **Ron Littlepage: Thanks to Obama, our coast is in danger**

By: Ron Littlepage

If this isn't already on your radar screen, it should be.

With the blessing of President Barack Obama, plans are proceeding to allow seismic airgun testing in the Atlantic off of Florida's coast in the search for oil and gas.

For those concerned about the environment, there was some good news last month when the federal government released its five-year plan for offshore drilling leases in the Atlantic and didn't include Florida.

With the memory of the devastating impact of the BP disaster on Florida's Gulf Coast still fresh, that provided some relief.

But energy companies would still be able to explore off Florida's Atlantic coast for drilling sites that could be approved when the next five-year plan rolls around.

And they would do that exploration by using seismic airguns that are towed behind vessels that shoot pulses of compressed air to the seabed to locate hydrocarbon deposits.

### **MARINE MAMMALS WILL DIE**

It's not a single blast.

"Imagine dynamite going off in your living room or in your backyard every 10 seconds for days to weeks at a time," Matthew Huelsenbeck, a marine scientist at Oceana, one of the environmental groups opposing the plan, told National Geographic.

Just how loud those blasts are is a point of contention.

A conservative estimate places the sound level at 180 decibels.

According to a Decibel Equivalent Table found online, 180 decibels is equal to the sound produced by one pound of TNT exploding within 15 feet of you, which fits with Huelsenbeck's description.

Others argue the sound would be 100,000 times more intense than the sound of a jet engine.

So what's all the noise about the noise?

An environmental impact study done by the federal government concluded the seismic airgun blasts would have "moderate" impact on marine mammals and sea turtles.

That “moderate” impact, according to the study, would cause injury or even death for 138,000 marine animals.

Millions more could have their feeding and migration patterns disrupted.

The extremely rare North Atlantic Right Whales, which are familiar to our coast, would be in danger.

And fisheries that are commercially important would likely be impacted, Oceana’s Huelsenbeck told National Geographic.

If that’s “moderate,” I can’t imagine what the federal government would consider as high impact.

## JOBS WILL BE LOST

Last week, a group supporting drilling for oil and gas came to Jacksonville for a meeting of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which was conducting a public hearing, to argue for including Florida in the five-year plan.

Their pitch was for more jobs for Florida.

Just ask the people living along Florida’s Gulf Coast what happens to jobs when oil and gas drilling operations, in spite of assurances to the contrary, go terribly wrong.

Think about what happens to jobs when commercial and recreational fishing goes into the tank when the dangers from seismic airgun testing turn out to be not so “moderate.”

And it’s not just the waters off Florida that will be impacted.

The entire East Coast will be at risk if these plans are allowed to stand.

The Matanzas Riverkeeper organization is one of the local groups fighting against the seismic testing and drilling.

Cities along Florida’s Atlantic coast have passed resolutions in opposition, including Atlantic Beach, St. Augustine and Fernandina Beach.

It’s time Jacksonville’s City Council joined in.

The amount of oil and gas deposits along the Eastern Seaboard has been described as a “drop in the bucket” when compared to the reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

The drill, baby, drill supporters say there’s much more.

Even if they are right, it’s not worth it.