



March 2, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
 U.S. Secretary of Interior
 Department of the Interior
 1849 C Street, N.W.
 Washington DC 20240

Re: 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program

Dear Secretary Zinke,

On behalf of U.S. aquariums and zoos and our hundreds of millions of members and annual visitors, we are writing to urge you not to open new areas of U.S. offshore waters to oil and gas exploration and drilling as proposed in the 2019-2024 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program. In addition, we strongly request that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management do more to reach out to the nation's coastal communities and schedule opportunities in those communities to receive input and feedback on the proposed program.

As aquariums and zoos across the country, we know firsthand the connection between a healthy ocean and a strong national economy. Many of our institutions are located in coastal states, where clean and accessible ocean and freshwater environments draw visitors to our shores, generate billions of dollars for our local and state economies, and support tens of thousands of jobs. We have a vested interest in ensuring the best safeguards possible are in place to protect the well-being of our coastal communities, as well as the wildlife and habitats on which our tourism-based economies depend.

Expanded oil and gas exploration and drilling poses an unnecessary and unacceptable risk to our coastal communities, and our economic future. The Draft Proposed Program exposes nearly all of our nation's coasts to the threat of devastating oil spills. The impacts of the oil disasters in Santa Barbara and Prince William Sound still linger, and the Gulf region has only begun its long-term recovery from the BP/Deepwater Horizon blowout that discharged over 200 million gallons of oil. This spill alone covered over 1,000 miles of shoreline and had grievous effects on seabirds, sea turtles, corals, tuna and dolphins, as well as thousands of coastal residents and ocean-dependent businesses.

The health and productivity of the ocean and coast is a symbol of U.S. strength and leadership. We are proud to showcase the living treasures of our nation's ocean and coast in our aquariums and zoos, and to inspire stewardship of these irreplaceable national assets. We urge you not to open new areas to offshore oil and gas drilling, and to do more to include the voices of coastal residents in the development of the Draft Proposed Program.

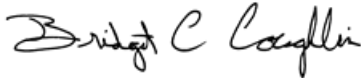
Sincerely,



Julie Packard
Executive Director
Monterey Bay Aquarium



John Racanelli
CEO
National Aquarium



Bridget C. Coughlin, PhD
President and CEO
John G. Shedd Aquarium



Gary Geddes
Director
Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium



Robert Davidson
CEO
Seattle Aquarium



Eric Rose
Vice President and Executive Director
Newport Aquarium



Cynthia Whitbred-Spanoulis
Executive Director
Virginia Aquarium & Marine
Science Center



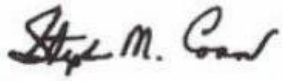
Dennis Pate
CEO and Executive Director
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium



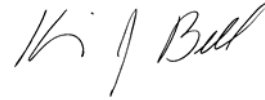
Keith Sanford
President and CEO
Tennessee Aquarium




Keith Winsten
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Brevard Zoo



Stephen Coan
President & CEO
Mystic Aquarium



Kevin Bell
President & CEO
Lincoln Park Zoo



Robert Jenkins
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Alejandro Grajal
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Woodland Park Zoo



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Lee Ehmke
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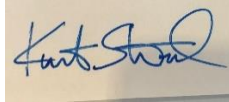
Greg Bockheim
Executive Director
Virginia Zoological Park



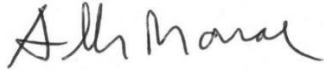
Jeremy Goodman
Executive Director
Roger Williams Park Zoo



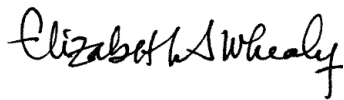
Rebecca Snyder
Curator of Conservation and Science
Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden



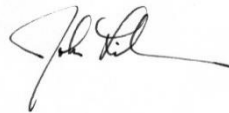
Kurt Strand
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Elizabeth Whealy
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Great Plains Zoo



John Linehan
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