

THE DAILY NEWS

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Offshore drilling: Handle with care

According to a recent study from WalletHub, Tar Heels, in the main, are pretty “eco-friendly.” Nationally we rank 22nd overall when it comes to protecting the environment.

For the record, Vermont and Oregon are first and second in eco-friendliness. Dead last? Well it's Louisiana with Texas just barely in front it.

WalletHub compared each of the 50 states in terms of 14 metrics designed to illustrate each state's environmental quality and how policies impact those areas. North Carolina, now among the most populated states, fared poorly in only one area — water quality. Our rank is No. 39. That's not much of a surprise considering well-documented incidents like the coal ash spill in the Dan River just last year.

Recently, Gov. Pat McCrory gave a statement to a congressional subcommittee regarding offshore drilling for oil and natural gas off the North Carolina coast. McCrory wanted to make the case that a 50-mile buffer proposed by the federal government for drilling for oil and gas in the Atlantic Ocean is too far and would keep the most valued drilling sites off limits and restrict development for no reason.

There are, however, myriad reasons for state residents to be wary of offshore drilling that might veer too close to some of North Carolina's most picturesque, visited and economically valuable sites.

We're also talking about landmarks rooted in our maritime history, locales that make our state a powerful lure for visitors who spend millions of dollars annually and oceans that have supported commercial fishing families for generations. We're talking about a geographic feature that makes North Carolina stand out — a jewel that should be polished and protected, not put in potential peril.

Offshore drilling has been controversial in this and other states for decades. The energy industry sees the area as a potentially untapped resource available to possible exploration again when President Obama moved to open waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia to drilling.