

Protecting Florida’s Gulf Coast from Offshore Drilling Preserves Military Readiness

Defense is Florida’s fourth largest industry, with a total economic footprint of roughly \$78.9 billion.¹ The large area off Florida’s Gulf coast – known as the eastern Gulf of Mexico – has a long history of providing unconstrained access for military training and testing activities that are essential to U.S. national security.² Recognizing the importance of this area for national defense training, Congress enacted the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) to protect this section of the Gulf from any offshore oil and gas development in 2006.³

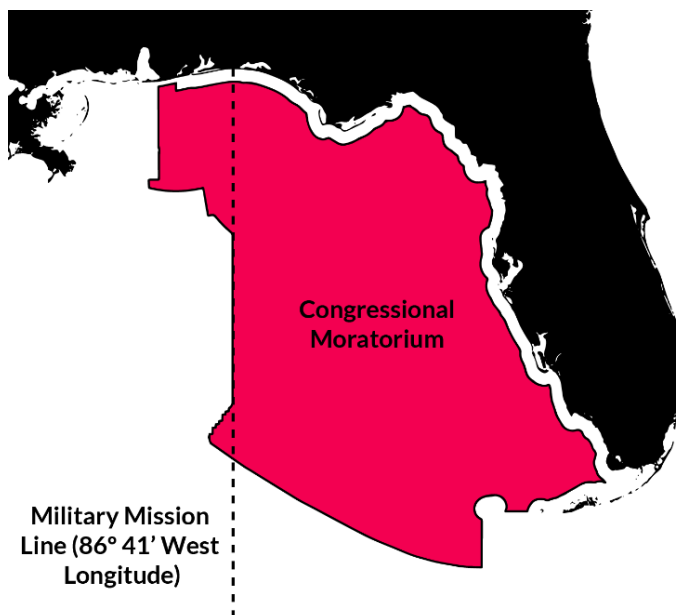
All waters shown in red below and east of the Military Mission Line (MML) are off limits to offshore drilling activities.⁴ While this law protects the majority of the eastern Gulf of Mexico today, it is set to expire in 2022.⁵ A permanent moratorium is necessary to ensure vital military readiness activities can continue without interference, while also protecting Florida’s Gulf coast communities from the impacts of dirty and dangerous offshore drilling.

This offshore drilling moratorium is critical for Florida’s defense and military industries, which host 20 major military installations in the state and account for nearly 775,000 jobs.⁶ Unhindered access to the eastern Gulf of Mexico is crucial to maintaining the long-term prospects of this industry and the jobs it supports throughout Florida. Protecting this area is a win for the environment, coastal business owners, the defense industry and our national security.

Eastern Gulf of Mexico Critical for Military Operations

The portion of the Gulf of Mexico east of the MML⁷ is kept free from oil and gas activities so the Department of Defense (DOD) can maintain military readiness. This large-scale, flexible training space is an irreplaceable national asset for developing America’s leading defense technologies.

- The area east of the MML is the largest over-water DOD training area in the continental U.S., providing roughly 101,000 square miles of uninterrupted surface and airspace.⁸ The Gulf Range Complex is larger than all other training ranges in the continental U.S. combined.⁹
- The enormous size of the Gulf range coupled with numerous adjacent military installations creates a national asset for military test operations that simply cannot be replicated anywhere else.¹⁰
- The eastern Gulf of Mexico is the nation’s best training area that replicates conditions for overseas military operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf and Indo-Pacific Theater.¹¹



- If offshore drilling expanded east of the MML, military flexibility would be lost, and existing operations would be severely affected.¹²
- Without access to test emerging weapons systems and develop precise weapons in the eastern Gulf, Florida loses the primary reason to host its major military installations along with the economic boost these generate.¹³
- Low vessel traffic in the eastern Gulf allows DOD operations to proceed effectively. Any increase in vessel traffic throughout this area – especially oil tankers and rig related vessels – would significantly impact military activities with a large safety footprint.¹⁴

Military Opposition to Offshore Drilling

- The DOD, Florida Defense Support Task Force and NASA have expressed concerns about offshore oil and gas development threatening their ability to perform critical activities.¹⁵
- According to the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, “the moratorium is essential for developing and sustaining the Air Force’s future combat capabilities.”¹⁶
- The Florida Defense Support Task Force stated that “drilling east of the MML would mean loss of ranges and possible relocation of aircraft/bases to other unrestricted range areas.”¹⁷ Defense is Florida’s fourth largest industry, and in northwest Florida, 65% of the regional economy is “considerably dependent on unconstrained access to eastern Gulf of Mexico airspace and sea space.”¹⁸
- The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense stated, “the moratorium is essential for developing and sustaining our nation’s combat capabilities.”¹⁹

The administration’s sweeping actions to expand offshore drilling to nearly all federal waters ignores mounting opposition, threats to coastal economies and dangers to ongoing military missions. Pursuing offshore drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico risks an irreplaceable national asset. The loss of military training and testing east of the MML could result in a less capable and less prepared military force – an outcome directly at odds with America’s defense goals.²⁰

¹ Florida Chamber of Commerce. The Statewide Impact of Florida’s Military Economy is More Than \$70 Billion. *Florida Scorecard*. Available: <https://www.flchamber.com/know-statewide-impact-floridas-military-economy-70-billion/>

² Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Available: <http://www.iadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DOD-Offshore-Report.pdf>

³ Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. Areas Under Restriction. *Oil & Gas Energy*. Available: <https://www.boem.gov/Areas-Under-Moratoria/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 43 USC 1331. Sec. 104. Moratorium on Oil and Gas Leasing in Certain Areas of Gulf of Mexico. *Gulf of Mexico Energy Security*. Available: https://www.boem.gov/uploadedFiles/BOEM/Oil_and_Gas_Energy_Program/Energy_Economics/Revenue_Sharing/GOMESA.pdf

⁶ Florida Chamber of Commerce. The Statewide Impact of Florida’s Military Economy is More Than \$70 Billion. *Florida Scorecard*. Available: <https://www.flchamber.com/know-statewide-impact-floridas-military-economy-70-billion/>

⁷ Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. Areas Under Restriction. *Oil & Gas Energy*. Available: <https://www.boem.gov/Areas-Under-Moratoria/>

⁸ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Available: <http://www.iadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DOD-Offshore-Report.pdf>

⁹ Florida Defense Support Task Force (2017) Oil Drilling & Military Mission Compatibility In the Gulf of Mexico. *Enterprise Florida, Inc.* Available: <http://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/fdstf-white-paper-oil-drilling-and-military-mission-compatibility.pdf>

¹⁰ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Available: <http://www.iadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DOD-Offshore-Report.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Florida Defense Support Task Force (2017) Oil Drilling & Military Mission Compatibility In the Gulf of Mexico. *Enterprise Florida, Inc.* Available: <http://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/fdstf-white-paper-oil-drilling-and-military-mission-compatibility.pdf>

¹⁴ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Available: <http://www.iadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DOD-Offshore-Report.pdf>

¹⁵ Oceana. Grassroots Opposition to Atlantic Drilling and Seismic Airgun Blasting. *Climate and Energy*. Available: <http://usa.oceana.org/climate-and-energy/grassroots-opposition-atlantic-drilling-and-seismic-airgun-blasting>

¹⁶ Department of the Air Force (2017) Letter to Senator Bill Nelson. *Office of the Chief of Staff*. Available:

<https://www.billnelson.senate.gov/sites/default/files/06.27.17%20CSAF%20Letter%20to%20Sen%20Nelson%20Re%20Moratorium%20on%20Leasing%20Land.pdf>

¹⁷ Florida Defense Support Task Force (2017) Oil Drilling & Military Mission Compatibility In the Gulf of Mexico. *Enterprise Florida, Inc.* Available:

<https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/FDSTF-White-Paper-Oil-Drilling-and-Military-Mission-Compatibility.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Department of Defense (2017) Letter to Representative Matt Gaetz. *Office of the Under Secretary of Defense*. Available:

https://usa.oceana.org/sites/default/files/662/2017042_house_letter_to_secdef_re_gulf_drilling_moratorium_response.pdf

²⁰ Department of Defense (2018) Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Available: <http://www.iadc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DOD-Offshore-Report.pdf>