Kelly Hammerle
National Program Manager
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
U.S. Department of Interior
45600 Woodland Road,
Sterling, VA 20166-9216

Re: Draft Proposed Program and Comments on the Preparation of the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program

Dear Ms. Hammerle,

As religious organizations, representing hundreds of thousands of people of faith, we strongly oppose the expansion of offshore drilling in the nation's waters in the new Oil and Gas Leasing Program. Offshore drilling is a threat to the oceans and God's global creation.

As people of faith, we believe we have a moral responsibility to be caretakers and protectors of Creation, as well as a responsibility to current and future generations to reduce the pollution and toxins in the air, and water. The oceans provide food for billions of our neighbors in the US and around the world. Our surrounding waters are also essential to coastal communities who depend on them for jobs as well as people who enjoy them for recreation.

Expanding drilling into the Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic and Eastern Gulf of America, which are still largely undefiled, would put coastal ecosystems at risk due to the implicated dangers of oil and gas drilling. These ecosystems are already under threat of plastic pollution and runoff from on-land activities such as farming. Oil and gas drilling would only increase the likelihood of pollution via oil spills, in addition to the dangers of exploration through seismic blasting, which have extreme negative effects on charismatic marine mammals, and important fisheries. All of which would have disastrous effects on coastal communities.

Most of these communities have been largely untouched by the oil and gas industry, allowing their economies to thrive off tourism, and commercial and recreational fishing. Expanding drilling to the unaffected areas would vastly affect the beauty of the communities and would negatively affect their economies as well as the national GDP. Coastal and near-coastal communities are also experiencing high rates of flooding, due to more storms and their increased intensity. The communities already affected by offshore drilling currently battle the dangers to their health and safety caused by industry. This will be made worse by the mandated lease sales in H.R. 1 aimed at perpetuating drilling. Allowing oil and gas expansion does not honor Creation or protect our neighbors.

Instead of expanding drilling and by extension fossil fuel usage, we should be investing in the energy sources God has made readily available to us and not buried under miles of earth. Solar and wind energy are becoming increasingly reliable and are much cheaper to harness than oil and gas. These energy sources are clean, provide good jobs, and position our country as a leader, encouraging our energy dominance in a sustainable way.

Americans are ready to move forward into a bright clean future, not relying on the harmful and dirty energy to power our lives. People of faith want to preserve God's Creation rather than exploiting it for oil and gas thereby risking the communities and businesses that rely on them.

We urge you to join us as God's stewards and protectors of the oceans and to respect the local residents, businesses, and millions of Americans who have already made clear their support for not drilling off our nation's beaches.

Sincerely,

1. Adamah
2. Alliance of Baptists
3. American Friends Service Committee
4. Anabaptist Climate Collaborative
5. Aquarian Minyan
6. Bay Area Jewish Earth Alliance
7. Bronx Jews for Climate Action
8. California Interfaith Power & Light
9. CAST - Jewish Floridians for Climate Action
10. Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
11. Climate Reality Project – Miami/ Fort Lauderdale Chapter
12. Creation Care Partners, Inc.
13. Creation Justice Network, American Baptist Churches USA
14. Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action

15. Franciscan Action Network
16. GreenFaith
17. Kentucky Interfaith Power & Light, Inc.
18. Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers
19. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
20. Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic
21. Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light
22. Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
23. Michigan Interfaith Power & Light
24. National Religious Partnership for the Environment
25. Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light
26. New Mexico Interfaith Power & Light
27. Passionists International
28. Payne Theological Seminary
29. Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church
30. Reformed Church in America
31. Repair the Sea - Tikkun HaYam
32. Seven Circles Foundation
33. Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
34. United Church of Christ
35. Waterspirit