January 20, 2026

11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program
Ms. Kelly Hammerle
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (VAM–LD)
U.S. Department of Interior
45600 Woodland Road,
Sterling, VA 20166-9216

RE: Surfrider Foundation Opposition to New Lease Sales in the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program

Dear Secretary,
The Surfrider Foundation ("Surfrider") submits these comments on the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's ("BOEM") 11th National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program. Surfrider is a grassroots environmental organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves, and beaches for all people through a powerful activist network. We submit these comments on behalf of our U.S. network of 200 chapters and clubs[1], and more than 350,000 members and supporters in the United States.

Opposition to New Oil & Gas Lease Sales in the Draft Proposed Program

The Surfrider Foundation strongly opposes any new oil and gas lease sales in the 11th OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The expansion of offshore oil and gas development in U.S. waters, including California, the Gulf of Mexico, Alaska, and the Arctic Ocean would cause significant and unnecessary negative impacts to our nation's marine ecosystems, wildlife, coastal and inland communities, and vital recreation, tourism, and fisheries industries. New offshore oil and gas leasing would also worsen climate change as our nation and world struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Instead of approving additional oil and gas leasing in U.S. waters, our nation should prioritize clean energy by investing in a just and equitable transition to renewable energy. Accordingly, we urge the Department of Interior to adopt an 11th OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program with no new leases.

[1] Surfrider Foundation. 2026. https://www.surfrider.org/chapters

Legal Requirements Under OCSLA

Pursuant to the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act ("OCSLA"), an oil and gas leasing program shall consist of a schedule of proposed lease sales indicating, as precisely as possible, the size, timing, and location of leasing activity which the Secretary of the Interior ("Secretary") determines will best meet national energy needs for the five year period following its approval or reapproval. (OCSLA, § 18(a)). Proposed new leasing in the National Program would conflict with OCSLA which requires that management of the Outer Continental Shelf be conducted in a manner which considers explicit principles, including the economic, social, and environmental values of the renewable and nonrenewable resources within the OCS, and the potential impact of oil and gas exploration on other resources values of the OCS, including the marine, coastal, and human environments.[2] These resources are responsible for enormous economic and social benefits that must be considered in the decision making process. Further, in selecting the locations to be included within a Program, the Secretary *shall*, "to the maximum extent practicable," obtain a proper balance between the potential for environmental damage, the potential for the discovery of oil and gas, and the potential for adverse impact on the coastal zone.[3]

Specifically, the timing and location of oil and gas exploration, development, and production provided for in any oil and gas leasing program must be based on a careful consideration of numerous factors, including:

- Existing information concerning the geographical, geological, and ecological characteristics of such regions;[4]
- Other uses of the sea and seabed, including fisheries, navigation, existing or proposed sealands, potential sites of deepwater ports, and other anticipated uses of the resources and space of the OCS;[5]
- Laws, goals, and policies of affected States which have specifically been identified by the Governors of such States as relevant matters for the Secretary's consideration;[6]
- The location of regions with respect to regional and national energy markets, and the needs of those markets;[7] and
- The relative environmental sensitivity and marine productivity of the OCS.[8]

Harmful Impacts to the Environment, Economy and Communities

With this framework in mind and considering each of the foregoing principles, including the potential for environmental damage and adverse impacts on the coastal zone (including

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[2] OCSLA § 18(a)(1)
[3] OCSLA § 18(a)(3); 43 U.S.C. 1344(a)(3)
[4] OCSLA § 18(a)(2)(A)
[5] OCSLA § 18(a)(2)(D)
[6] OCSLA § 18(a)(2)(F)
[7] OCSLA § 18(a)(2)(C)
[8] OCSLA § 18(a)(2)(G)

economic losses), versus the potential for discovery of oil and gas, and considering the foreseeable national energy needs in light of national policies favoring renewables and greenhouse gas reductions, it is clear that the 11th Program should not include new lease sales. New leasing on the OCS would result in new drilling operations, oil transport by tankers, the installation and operations of platforms, pipelines and refineries, and water, air and noise pollution. Collectively these activities would significantly damage the environment, marine wildlife, coastal economies, vulnerable communities and ways of life.

Even without a spill, routine offshore oil and gas exploration, development, and production impacts must be considered, including the legal release of toxic drilling muds, referred to as synthetic based drilling muds, and elevated noise levels from increased vehicle traffic. Drilling muds directly smother and impact benthic communities up to 2 km from disposal. Though muds settle in sediments (as opposed to being suspended in the water column) these toxic substances bioaccumulate in benthic species such as mollusks, which can then travel up the food chain and have ecosystem level impacts.[9] Drilling muds also reduce oxygen content of surrounding soils, reducing biodiversity of affected benthic communities, and altering species composition. Increased vehicle traffic and rig operations create noise levels that elevate stress levels, alter behavior and increase risk of mortality in a wide variety of marine species.[10]

New offshore drilling would also expose the marine environment and coastal communities to the risks of another catastrophic oil spill, such as the 2010 BP Oil Spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Such oil spills are highly damaging to both the natural environment and dependent human uses and values. For instance, the BP Oil Spill released over 200 million gallons of oil into the environment and tarnished 1,100 miles of coastline across four states. Oil and gas companies claim that improvements in technology have greatly reduced the likelihood of a spill, yet between 2006 and 2015, 389 oil spills occurred from U.S. based OCS platforms and pipelines (not even counting associated vessels and barges), tarnishing coastlines with roughly 206.5 million gallons of oil. [11]

Additionally, the environmental impacts of new OCS leasing would directly harm our nation's recreation, tourism, and fisheries industries that generate over $520 billion annually.[12] These industries depend on a clean coastal environment to support a combined 2.5 million jobs across the United States. Allowing new offshore drilling will damage public

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[9] Neff, J.M. et al. 2000. Environmental Impacts of Synthetic Based Drilling Fluids. U.S. Department of the Interior Minerals Management Service Gulf of Mexico OCS Region. https://www.boem.gov/ESPIS/3/3175.pdf

[10] Peng, C. 2015. Noise in the Sea and Its Impacts on Marine Organisms. I*nternational Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* Vol. 12, No. 10, pp. 12304–12323. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4626970/

[11] Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement. 2016. Update of Occurrence Rates for Offshore Oil Spills. https://www.bsee.gov/sites/bsee.gov/files/osrr-oil-spill-response-research/1086aa.pdf

[12] Houston, J.R. 2024. The Economic Value of America's Beaches. *Shore and Beach*, Vol. 92, No. 2. https://asbpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/92_2_houston_color.pdf

resources that these industries depend upon by generating harmful impacts through every phase of the drilling process. Such drilling will subject communities to the ever-present risks of oil spills and onshore impacts, including but not limited to onshore oil infrastructure, degraded air quality, noise, globs of oil on the beaches, strong fumes of petroleum, and beach closures,[13] which can be catastrophic to both the environment and economy. Impacts could also include harmful effects from chemical dispersants that were applied following the BP Oil Spill, which are also toxic to wildlife and human health. Coastal recreation opportunities depend on clean beaches and waters, abundant wildlife, and scenic viewsheds – all of which would be compromised by the expansion of offshore drilling and an increased risk of spills.

New offshore oil and gas leasing would also harm our nation's recreational and commercial fisheries. Previous spills have had an immediate and direct impact on local fishing industries, with a "minimum loss in annual landed value of U.S. $247 million" just from the BP Oil Spill on commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.[14] Even without a spill, routine offshore oil and gas exploration, development, and production harms the marine environment through oil pollution and the release of toxic drilling muds. These ongoing impacts to the marine environment could significantly reduce fish stock and fish health in offshore waters, which will directly impact the Gulf's fishing industry.

Environmental Justice Issues

When approving a National OCS Program, the OCSLA requires the Secretary to consider eight enumerated factors, some of which are discussed above, including the "*equitable sharing of developmental benefits and environmental risks among regions*".[15] Given past approval of extensive oil and gas leasing in the Gulf of Mexico - a region that continues to face enormous environmental and social impacts from oil and gas development - the Department is clearly not applying an equitable approach to the geographic distribution of risks. Potential new leasing in the Gulf would further concentrate the aforementioned impacts of new oil and gas leasing on a region that currently has nearly 2,000 active leases,

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[13] The summer following the 2010 BP oil spill, Gulf beaches from Louisiana to the Florida panhandle were closed or subject to health advisories nearly 10 times as often as the prior summer, according to a report by the Natural Resources Defense Counsel. According to the report, the oil spill affected 49 of 253 beach segments NRDC monitored in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. In Louisiana, 11 of the 28 monitored beach segments were closed in summer 2010, with 793 combined days of closings compared to 180 advisory days the same time the year prior. In Alabama, there were 307 combined days of beach advisories, compared to no advisory days at the same time the year prior. In Florida, 16 of the 180 beaches in the western part of the Panhandle were impacted, resulting in 442 days of advisories, compared with no advisories in the same timeframe the year prior. Kelli Kennedy, Gulf beach closings and warnings by the thousands from Louisiana to Florida, due to BP oil spill, July 29, 2010 (citing to https://www.nrdc.org/media/2010/100728)

[14] McCrea-Strub, A. 2011. Potential Impact of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on Commercial Fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. Fisheries Magazine, Vol. 36, No. 7, pp. 332-336. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/03632415.2011.589334/full

[15] Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA). Section 18

where more than 95% of current OCS production occurs, and in a region already suffering disproportionate petrochemical industry impacts.[16]

This raises significant environmental justice concerns, as oil and gas development disproportionately impacts lower-income and communities of color who, too often, bear the brunt of fossil fuel operations.[17] For example, in the Gulf of Mexico, the oil industry has contributed to the extensive loss of coastal wetlands, leaving communities more vulnerable to flooding and extreme weather events.[18] According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Louisiana's wetlands have experienced an estimated 80 percent reduction from historical extent.[19] Such loss of coastal wetlands and vegetation puts vulnerable communities at increased risk, as these natural resources provide protection from storm surge and flooding, while contributing to ecological health and fisheries and aquaculture operations.[20] This often disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities and communities of color. Texas Southern University professor Robert Bullard says the communities of color that faced housing discrimination a century ago now live in areas that are more prone to flooding, urban heat islands, and pollution. "They are on the front line of climate change. They are at ground zero. And if you look at FEMA's recovery dollars, where they go, money follows money, money follows power, money follows whites. And communities of color generally are further marginalized after storm after storm after storm."[21]

Meanwhile, onshore infrastructure associated with offshore leasing pollutes frontline communities (and beyond) and damages public health. Such infrastructure includes oil refineries that release air pollutants such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide. Related onshore development also includes petrochemical facilities that are linked with the region's oil and gas operations. Louisiana's Mississippi River Basin, an area notoriously referred to as "Cancer Alley," is home to approximately 150 industrial plants—including oil refineries and petrochemical facilities that use refined products from refineries as feedstocks for products like plastics and solvents - that release

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[16] Baurick, T. et al. 2019. Welcome to "Cancer Alley," Where Toxic Air Is About to Get Worse. ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/welcome-to-cancer-alley-where-toxic-air-is-about-to-get-worse

[17] Id; see also Bullard, R. 2011. Environmental justice communities bear brunt of BP's oil spill waste disposal. Facing South. April 26, 2011. https://www.facingsouth.org/2011/04/voices-environmental-justice-communities-bear-brunt-of- bps-oil-spill-waste-disposal.html.

[18] Williams, J.S. Louisiana Coastal Wetlands: A Resource at Risk. US Geological Survey Fact Sheet. pubs.usgs.gov/fs/la-wetlands/

[19] Williams, J.S. Louisiana Coastal Wetlands: A Resource at Risk. US Geological Survey Fact Sheet. pubs.usgs.gov/fs/la-wetlands/

[20] Williams, J.S. Coastal Erosion and Land Loss Around the United States: Strategies to Manage and Protect Coastal Resources- Examples from Louisiana. US Geological Survey, Coastal and Marine Geology Program. *Coastal Ecosystems and Federal Activities Technical Training Symposium Proceedings.* https://www.fws.gov/nc-es/ecoconf/williams%20paper.pdf

[21] See, e.g., https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/climate-changes-uneven-impact-on-communities-of-color-compounded-by-uneven-flow-of-aid

a cocktail of toxic pollution in communities overwhelmingly composed of people of color.[22] Many of the new plants planned in Louisiana's Mississippi River basin are being built in or near communities that EPA models estimate already have some of the most dangerous air in America. The health issues are particularly severe in predominantly black and poor communities, like St. Gabriel, but other communities are also impacted.[23]
The Department of Interior must account for these inequities in its analysis of the impacts, including cumulative impacts, of new oil and gas lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico region. This includes ensuring federal consistency with state coastal management programs.

Climate Change Impacts

The Draft Proposed Program would also result in billions of metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions released into the world's atmosphere, undermining national and global efforts to address climate change[24]. As BOEM noted in its Proposed Program for 2024-2029, "there is scientific consensus and confidence, as illustrated by a recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that avoiding the most severe climate impacts by limiting global warming to 1.5°C will require reducing global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to net-zero by 2050 (IPCC 2022)."[25] Potential inclusion of new offshore oil and gas lease sales in the next 5-year program would make the achievement of net-zero emissions by 2050 less likely. According to the International Energy Agency, a roadmap to net-zero emissions by 2050 for the global energy sector would require no new investment in fossil fuel supply projects.[26]

Furthermore, the 11th National Program must account for forward thinking policies that are being approved and/or will foreseeably be adopted in the near future to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is an important consideration when determining national energy needs and how demand for OCS oil and gas might differ in the future under changing climate policies. For example, in September 2020, California Governor Newsom issued an Executive Order directing the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to develop regulations mandating that 100 percent of in-state sales of new passenger cars and trucks be zero-emission by

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[22] Cirino, E. 2021. Thicker Than Water: The Quest for Solutions to the Plastic Crisis. Island Press; See also UN News. Environmental racism in Louisiana's 'Cancer Alley', must end, say UN human rights experts (March 2021). Available at https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086172
[23] Baurick, T. et al. 2019. Welcome to "Cancer Alley," Where Toxic Air Is About to Get Worse. ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/welcome-to-cancer-alley-where-toxic-air-is-about-to-get-worse

[24] Cooney, M. 2019. Trump's Offshore Drilling Plan Would be an Environmental Disaster. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/trumps-offshore-drilling-plan-environmental-disaster/
[25] Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. 2023. 2024–2029 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Final Program. BOEM 2023-058. https://www.boem.gov/2024-2029-Proposed-Final-Program. September 2023.
[26] International Energy Agency. 2021. Net Zero by 2050: A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector. https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/7ebafc81-74ed-412b-9c60- 5cc32c8396e4/NetZeroby2050-ARoadmapfortheGlobalEnergySector- SummaryforPolicyMakers_CORR.pdf.

2035.[27] In August 2022, CARB approved rules setting interim targets, requiring that 35 percent of new passenger vehicles sold by 2026 produce zero emissions, and climbing to 68 percent by 2030.[28] California's rule will very likely speed a wider transition to electric vehicles because many other states follow California's standards.

Sixteen other states typically follow California's lead when setting their own auto emissions standards; if they do so here, and most are expected to,[29] the restrictions would apply to about a third of the United States auto market. As such, this is expected to drive the market and innovation.[30] According to state regulators, California's new rule will cut greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles by more than 50 percent in 2040 from levels expected without the policy. Per CARB's chairwoman, this equates to eliminating 395 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions over that time period, or the equivalent of burning *915 million barrels of oil - in California alone*. The national needs must account for such policies.

Public Opposition to New Offshore Drilling

Finally, the Draft Proposed Program contradicts the views of the vast majority of the general public, including nearly two million people who submitted comments on the 10th OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program that was finalized in 2023. To date, over 400 municipalities, 2,500 elected officials, 59,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families across the United States have formally opposed new offshore oil and gas development in recognition of the threat it poses to public resources, communities and economies.[31] This opposition includes thousands of businesses in the Gulf of Mexico region represented through the Florida Gulf Coast Business Coalition.[32] The widespread opposition to new offshore drilling in U.S. waters is bipartisan and reflected throughout various regions of the country. The Interior Department must factor such overwhelming public opposition to new offshore drilling when making decisions regarding the next 5-year program.

Conclusion

In summary, Surfrider Foundation asks that you protect all U.S. waters from any new oil and gas leasing in the 11th OCS Oil and Gas Program. We appreciate the opportunity to provide

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[27] See https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/09/23/governor-newsom-announces-california-will-phase-out-gasoline-powered-cars-drastically-reduce-demand-for-fossil-fuel-in-californias-fight-against-climate-change/

[28] See CARB Resolution 22-12 (August 25, 2022), available at https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/barcu/board/books/2022/082522/prores22-12.pdf

[29] Per the New York Times, New York, Washington and Massachusetts already have similar legislation in the works, and many of the other states that typically follow California's lead are expected to consider similar rules over the next year or so. See https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/climate/california-gas-cars-emissions.html

[30] See https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/climate/california-gas-cars-emissions.html

[31] See https://www.regulations.gov/docket/BOEM-2017-0074

[32] Florida Gulf Coast Business Coalition. 2022. http://www.protectthegulfcoast.org

these comments on behalf of Surfrider's grassroots network of 200 chapters and clubs, and over 350,000 members and supporters.

Sincerely,

Pete Stauffer
Ocean Protection Manager
Surfrider Foundation