Kachemak Bay Watershed Council

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Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Submitted via: https://www.regulations.gov/commenton/BOEM-2025-0483-0001

RE: Public Comment on the Cook Inlet 5-Year Oil and Gas Lease Plan

The Kachemak Bay Watershed Council strongly opposes the proposed Cook Inlet 5-Year Oil and Gas Lease Plan. Expanding or extending offshore oil and gas leasing in Cook Inlet is inconsistent with sound environmental stewardship, economic prudence, and the long-term interests of Alaskans.

Cook Inlet is an ecologically unique and highly productive marine ecosystem that supports critical subsistence resources, commercial fisheries, and endangered wildlife, including the critically endangered Cook Inlet beluga whale. Any increase in leasing activity heightens the risk of spills, chronic pollution, seismic disturbance, and vessel traffic in an environment that is already under significant stress. It doesn't have to be on the scale of the Exxon Valdez disaster to be a catastrophe for Cook Inlet. A recent estimate from Lease Sale 258 estimated a 1 in 5 chance of at least one major oil spill. Salmon populations in these waters already face challenges from warming ocean and river temperatures; any oil and gas development in Lower Cook Inlet will open the door to unnecessary threats to our fisheries. Alaskans have worked for decades to protect these coastal waters and fisheries from oil and gas development, and we need your help to oppose new leases now. Even "low-probability" accidents would have irreversible consequences in a cold, dynamic inlet where cleanup is exceptionally difficult.

The plan also fails to adequately account for the economic reality of Cook Inlet. Alaska's fishing, tourism, and subsistence economies depend on clean water and healthy ecosystems. These sectors provide sustained, renewable economic value and local employment that far outweigh the short-term benefits of additional oil and gas leasing—especially as global markets shift away from fossil fuels. These businesses and cultural practices add hundreds of millions of dollars into local economies each year, and put food on the table for Alaskans and tourists alike. Fossil fuel development is a direct threat to these sustainable economies.

Moreover, advancing a new 5-year leasing plan contradicts climate science and national commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Approving new fossil fuel development locks in decades of emissions at a time when rapid transition to cleaner energy is both necessary and inevitable. Public lands and waters should not be used to delay that transition.

The environmental review for Lease 258 didn't adequately address impacts to endangered Cook Inlet beluga whales. BOEM's draft plan shows the same lack of care, only mentioning Cook Inlet belugas once, without any acknowledgement that the 331 remaining whales would be harmed by new development.

Finally, meaningful consultation with Tribes, local communities, and fishing stakeholders must be more than procedural. Many Alaskans who rely on Cook Inlet for food security and livelihoods have made it clear that additional leasing puts their way of life at risk. Their voices deserve decisive weight.

For these reasons, the Kachemak Bay Watershed Council urges decision-makers to reject the Cook Inlet 5-Year Lease Plan and instead prioritize protection of this irreplaceable ecosystem, investment in clean energy, and policies that support sustainable, long-term economic resilience for Alaska.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and Please contact me if you have any questions regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

Harold Shepherd, President