



Eastern Shore of Virginia CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

January 16, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

My name is Robie Marsh and I am the Executive Director of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce. Our organization is an over 400-member chamber of commerce that represents both businesses and individuals in Northampton and Accomack Counties. I write you today, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce, to ask that Virginia be excluded from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's next iteration of the Five-Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a peninsula extending 70 miles from the Maryland state line south to the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel. To the east are the seaside marshes, shallow bays, and barrier islands bordering the Atlantic Ocean. On the West our variety of creeks, large and small, flow into and border the Chesapeake Bay. Both Accomack and Northampton Counties have depended on and been involved in water-related activities since Captain John Smith's arrival in 1608. Our community depends on its major economic conductors that when combined, employ the largest percentage of our community in the Aquaculture, Aerospace and Technology, Department of Defense, Tourism, and Environmental Research.

Wallops Flight Facility is a strategic home to both NASA and the Department of Defense, due to its proximity to restricted military and special-use airspaces over the Atlantic and the Virginia Beach area. It is home to sub-orbital, orbital, and Unmanned Aerial Systems activities. Wallops' has a regional economic impact of roughly \$188 million, which includes 1,488 employees between NASA, NAVY and NOAA, and an additional 2,341 local jobs supported. Wallops also has a \$2.4 million impact on tourism here on the Shore. The iteration of the Five-Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program has a direct threat to the Wallops Flight Facility and the continuation of activities on its launch pads and runways.

Tourism is a major industry both in Virginia and specifically on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Virginia's tourism industry is the fifth largest private employer, with travelers spending over \$22 billion annually and supporting more than 200,000 jobs. Locally on the Shore, visitors spent roughly \$245 million and paid \$6.6 million in taxes through lodging, meals, and sales tax in 2014.

Virginia aquaculture farmers include 33 hard clam producers with 2013 sales totaling \$20.8 million. These growers produced 32% of total United States hard clam production in 2013 and is ranked number 1 in the United States. Hard clam is the second most valuable crop raised on the Eastern Shore, exceeding for example, the values of corn, soybeans, and wheat. A study conducted by economists from George Mason University estimates that economic activity associated with the aquaculture industries on the Eastern Shore of Virginia was estimated to be \$156.7 million during 2016, adding an additional value of \$114.4 million to the Eastern Shore's gross regional product.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's next iteration of the Five-Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program directly threatens the economy of the Eastern Shore of Virginia. For this reason, the board of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce voted to formally oppose the Five-Year Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Sincerely,

Robert N. Marsh Jr
Executive Director