

## Offshore drilling, testing could be revisited in a few years

MARCH 19, 2016

S.C. coast celebrates decision to pull plug on oil, gas exploration

---



As members of SODA – Stop Offshore Drilling in the Atlantic – toasted the ocean with champagne in paper cups, Jim Watkins of Pawleys Island made the point that the federal government decision to halt plans to sell leases for testing and likely drilling, was about much more than protecting Grand Strand beaches and tourism.

“It’s about all of creation,” says the retired Presbyterian clergyman. Humans “have responsibility to creation but when we believe we can do anything we want to do with creation, it will come back to bite us.

“Decisions humans make on energy are about partnership creation,” Watkins says. This is an important lesson to take from the victory celebrated on the North Litchfield beach and along the Atlantic coast from Georgia to Maryland. Sierra Weaver, senior attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center, termed it “an incredible day for the Southeast. It represents the hard work of thousands of people and protects some of our most cherished places, from the Chesapeake Bay and the Outer Banks to the South Carolina Lowcountry and Georgia barrier islands.”

Coastal communities along four states were unified in opposing a proposal to open areas for testing to determine the viability of oil and natural gas production. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management could have sold leases from 2017 to 2022. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell noted the grassroots opposition: “When you factor in conflicts with national defense, economic activities such as fishing and tourism, and opposition from many local communities, it simply doesn’t make sense to move forward with any lease sales in the coming five years.”

Every five years BOEM is required to evaluate potential new energy reserves. So folks such as Peg Howell, a former oil rig engineer, are prudent to be cautiously optimistic and point out the need to be vigilant. “In another five years, we could be fighting this fight again,” Howell said during the celebration in North Litchfield.

There is room for optimism. Petroleum and other fossil fuels are in declining use. Electrical power from wind turbines and solar panels is decreasing the use of coal – China is closing coal mines and increasing use of other energy sources. The United States and Canada are producing record volumes of petroleum from shale – so much that crude oil prices have dropped. Who would have thought the retail price of gasoline would be well below \$2 a gallon? A downside is the loss of thousands of oil field jobs.

Gov. Nikki Haley deserves much credit for a variety of economic development, including solar energy. She has been disappointing in continuing to call for offshore oil and gas exploration *and* protecting the ocean environment. We generally can’t have both at the same time. The bottom line is that we have more oil than we know what to do with, consumption is declining and if in the distant future Atlantic oil may be needed, it will still be there.

U.S. Rep. Tom Rice of Myrtle Beach has backed off a bit from his position – the national interest suggests a need for more details on what’s out there – but Rice could take a cue from his U.S. House colleague Mark Sanford, in Washington again from the 1st District. “This is fantastic news for the coast of South Carolina. It’s a decision that speaks volumes to the importance of voicing one’s opinion and local input in the political process.”

The BOEM decision is sound on several counts and it is without question a good call for South Carolina’s coast and the state’s tourism.

<http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com/opinion/editorials/article67131597.html>