

July 16, 2016

The Honorable Abigail Ross Hopper, Director  
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Hopper:

Thank you for removing the Atlantic Coast from the 2017-2022 Oil & Gas Leasing Program.

The Garden Club of Virginia is an active association of 47 clubs, whose members together form a group of more than 3,000 civic leaders from around the commonwealth. The Garden Club of Virginia has served Virginia for almost 100 years. Currently we contribute a combined \$11-million annual economic impact to Virginia's communities through our annual Historic Garden Week and Restoration of Historic Gardens.

In January 2016 the Board of Directors of the Garden Club of Virginia approved our opposition to offshore drilling for oil and gas along the Atlantic coastline.

We are aware that your administration is currently reviewing applications to conduct seismic airgun testing to search for oil and gas off the Atlantic coast, including Virginia and Virginia Beach specifically. We urge you to deny these permit applications as seismic airgun testing for oil and gas does not align with our position in opposition to the pursuit of offshore drilling along the Virginia Coastline.

While we appreciate the desire for more information about coastal assets, our understanding is that the information gathered by these seismic airgun surveys would serve to inform drilling for oil and gas off our coast, which we oppose. Additionally, we are concerned by the fact that the survey's information would not be available to the public or Virginia decision-makers.

Not only does seismic airgun testing lead the way for offshore drilling; seismic airgun blasts can negatively impact the marine sea life our tourism industry depends on, from bivalves to fish to sea turtles to whales. There is a significant body of peer-reviewed science indicating that seismic airgun testing can result in displacement of fish, cause declines in catch rates for certain fish species, and negatively impact marine mammals and other species. Seventy-five leading marine

scientists from around the world sent a letter to your administration in March 2015 stating that “the proposed seismic activity is likely to have significant, long-lasting, and widespread impacts on the reproduction and survival of fish and marine mammal populations in the region, including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale, of which only 500 remain.”

We respectfully request that you do not allow seismic airgun testing for oil and gas off the Atlantic Coast to move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nina Mustard". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Nina Mustard, President  
Garden Club of Virginia

CC: U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Administrator Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, Governor Terry McAuliffe, Lt. Governor Ralph Northam, U.S. Senator Mark Warner, U.S. Senator Tim Kaine