

Trump Administration Proposes Expansion of Offshore Drilling

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On January 4, 2018, the Trump administration announced plans to allow new offshore oil and gas drilling in United States coastal waters. The five-year plan, which has been released in [draft form](#), would make available 90 percent of the nation's Outer Continental Shelf acreage to development by private companies; 47 oil and gas lease sales are proposed for 2019 through 2024 (19 off the coast of Alaska, 12 in the Gulf of Mexico, nine in the Atlantic, and seven in the Pacific).

The proposal is in line with an April 28, 2017 [Executive Order](#) and the Interior Secretary's implementing Order 3350 (May 1, 2017). The Executive Order encourages expanding drilling in federal waters "in order to maintain the Nation's position as a global energy leader and foster energy security and resilience ... while ensuring that any such activity is safe and environmentally responsible."

Once the draft proposed program is published in the Federal Register, a 60-day public comment period will follow. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) will conduct public meetings with local stakeholders across the country beginning on January 16. Details for the public meetings can be found [here](#). As it is currently written, the plan enables private companies to begin drilling off the coasts as early as 2019. Seismic testing could begin sooner.

The proposal has met with backlash from environmental advocates. Former Vice President Al Gore wrote of the proposal, "President Trump is once again defying a majority of American citizens, states, and businesses. His offshore drilling proposal threatens our coastal communities, just to prop up a dying fossil fuel industry."

The proposal comes one week after the Department of the Interior issued a [proposed rule](#) that would amend (and, according to critics, significantly roll back) offshore drilling safety regulations that were put in place following the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Additionally, the tax bill signed into law in late December 2017 (P.L. 115-97) included a provision that opened a section of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas drilling.

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