



OFFSHORE DRILLING IN BRISTOL BAY: BACKGROUND & TALKING POINTS FOR TOWN HALL MEETING

Background:

Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea were **protected from offshore drilling for nearly 17 years**. However, Congress removed Bristol Bay from the congressional moratorium on offshore drilling in 2003 and in 2007 President Bush stripped away the final layer of protection for the region- the presidential leasing deferral.

The Bush administration then scheduled a Bristol Bay **lease sale for 2011** in the current (2007-2012) national Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Leasing Program. That sale, known as **North Aleutian Basin Sale 214**, is moving forward quickly and the Minerals Management Service is currently preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Just days before President Bush left office, he pushed through a draft version of a new OCS Leasing Program for 2010-2015. That program includes **Sale 214 in 2011 and also an additional Sale 239 in 2014**. Secretary Salazar is currently reviewing this program and deciding whether or not to go forward with Bristol Bay leases. What the Secretary hears at the town hall meeting, the hearing in Anchorage, and associated public comment period will be critical in determining whether or not he chooses to go forward with leasing in Bristol Bay's rich waters.

As a local community member, this is your chance to affect decisions that will have significant impacts on the region's fisheries, communities, traditions, and livelihoods for years to come.

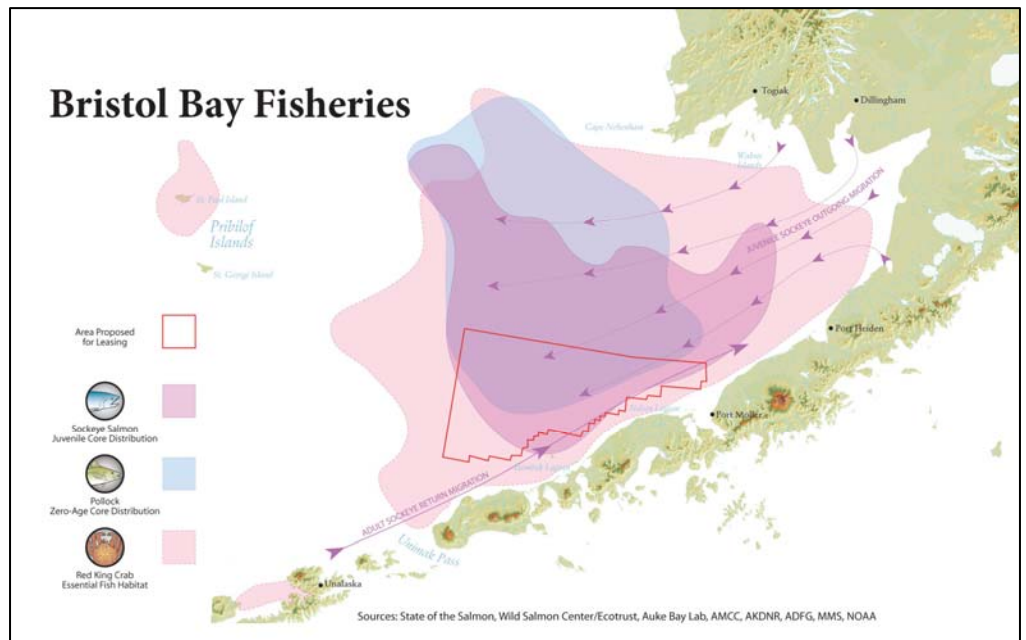
Talking Points:

Your own words and personal story are powerful- comment on the importance of healthy marine and coastal resources to you and your family, and urge the federal government to protect your way of life.

Urge Secretary Salazar and Senator Begich to **protect Bristol Bay offshore drilling and tell them not to move forward with scheduled leases.**

Other points to consider:

- Offshore drilling in the region could have significant **negative impacts on the fisheries, seabirds, waterfowl and marine mammals that are vital to local communities** and traditional cultures of Bristol Bay.
- The lease sale area occurs at the heart of important fishing grounds and habitat for salmon, halibut, herring, crab, pollock, cod, and flatfish. The sale area also overlaps or occurs near important habitat for birds and mammals including geese, belugas, and walrus.
- **Subsistence is the irreplaceable mainstay of Alaska Native tradition and culture.**



The map above shows the overlap of salmon, pollock, cod and red king crab habitat with the area proposed for drilling. Sockeye salmon have several key life stages that occur within and around the area proposed for leasing, placing them at great risk. Courtesy of WWF.

- Salmon is the life–blood of economies and ways of life in Dillingham and surrounding villages. In addition to salmon, southwestern Alaskan communities rely on halibut, herring, sea mammals and other ocean and coastal resources. Impacts from offshore drilling would threaten these important subsistence traditions.
- Other proposed industrial development projects such as Pebble Mine along with drilling would result in **massive cumulative impacts to the region’s communities and fisheries resources.**
- The federal government itself predicts **one large spill & numerous smaller spills** if drilling occurs. **Spilled oil** in the lease sale area **would move northward towards Bristol Bay’s salmon fisheries & towards Dillingham, & surrounding communities.**
- Spills could result in **fisheries closures** & could have long term effects on fish populations; the value of Bristol Bay salmon, other seafood products, & subsistence resources could be seriously harmed.
- Drilling would provide **very limited benefits** to the state & local communities, as **revenue sharing is not required** for leasing in federal waters.
- Experts have stated drilling in the region is **unlikely to have any effect on local energy prices** & would generate few new jobs in communities.
- **We already determined that Bristol Bay is too sensitive an area to allow offshore oil and gas drilling.** After the Exxon Valdez oil spill demonstrated the tremendous damage an oil spill in Alaskan waters can have on fish, wildlife, and communities, Congress placed the region under the nationwide offshore drilling moratorium and the American public paid more than \$100 million dollars in 1995 to buy back Bristol Bay leases sold in the 1980s.
- The risks **of offshore drilling** in Bristol Bay’s rich waters from seismic surveys, contaminated discharges, oil spills, and the sprawling footprint of infrastructure **are simply too great** for the limited, short-term benefits.
- **Strong opposition to drilling remains in Bristol Bay.** Nearly 50 Tribes, Native associations, and fishing organizations are opposed to drilling.
- **It’s time that America aggressively invests in the development of renewable energy.** The burning of fossil fuels since the beginning of the industrial revolution has resulted in over 500 billion tons of carbon dioxide being absorbed by the world’s atmosphere and today over 20 million tons daily are absorbed by the world’s oceans. This is changing the entire chemical balance of the ocean better known as **ocean acidification**. Scientists predict ocean acidification will have profound and lasting effect on the commercially viable ocean resources and subsistence foods that coastal communities depend on. We urge the Obama administration not to pursue drilling in sensitive areas of our ocean like Bristol Bay and to undertake an aggressive transition towards renewable energy options for our nation.
- **Drilling in Bristol Bay is not the answer** to reducing high local or national energy prices. Our nation cannot drill our way to energy independence and must aggressively pursue renewable energy technologies and implement energy efficiency and conservation measures to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. **Renewable energy resources exist in Alaska and the Bristol Bay region that could provide long-term, sustainable, lower-cost energy to residents while creating jobs consistent with the fisheries-based economy of Bristol Bay.**

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