

Offshore Drilling in Bristol Bay and the Southeast Bering Sea: Suggested Talking Points

- **The decision by President Obama and Secretary Salazar to cancel the planned 2011 lease sale in Bristol Bay and put in place protections for the region from offshore drilling until 2017 is a good first step, but we need permanent protection so future generations don't have to fight this same battle again.** We know from the [history of leasing, protections, and lost protections](#) that the threat will continue unless we have a lasting solution. We hope Congress and President Obama will move forward now with the permanent protection Bristol Bay deserves.
- **Offshore oil and gas operations pose serious risks to our nation's commercial fisheries stronghold in Bristol Bay and the Bering Sea.** These fisheries account for more than **40% of total U.S. fish catch**. The area targeted for offshore oil and gas development overlaps with vital habitat and fishing grounds for salmon, red king crab, herring, Pacific halibut and Bering Sea pollock and cod.
- **The economic benefits of *renewable* fisheries resources far outweigh the potential economic value of *nonrenewable* offshore oil and gas resources.** The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has estimated the total net economic value of developing Bristol Bay's oil and gas resources at \$7.7 billion dollars over the entire 25-40 year lifespan of the project. Every year of offshore drilling would put at risk **fisheries of the region valued at more than \$2 billion dollar annually**.
- **Strong opposition to drilling remains in Bristol Bay.** More than 66 Tribes, Native associations, and fishing organizations are opposed to drilling.
- **Bristol Bay is home to the world's largest wild run of sockeye salmon.** The region's salmon are important not only ecologically, with Bristol Bay serving as one of the last global strongholds for Pacific salmon, but also economically and culturally. The area targeted for leasing falls directly among important marine habitat for salmon from Bristol Bay and throughout western Alaska.
- **The Bristol Bay region is of global ecological importance for fish, seabirds, waterfowl and marine mammals.** The eastern Bering Sea is renowned for its enormous biological productivity and provides habitat for hundreds of fish species, dozens of marine mammal species, and is home to one of the world's greatest concentrations of seabird colonies.
- **Subsistence is the irreplaceable mainstay of Alaska Native tradition and culture.** Salmon are the life-blood of villages, both financially and culturally. In addition to salmon, southwestern Alaskan communities also rely on halibut, herring, sea mammals and other ocean and coastal resources. Impacts from offshore drilling would be a serious and constant threat to these important subsistence traditions.
- Drilling would provide **very limited benefits** to the state & local communities, as revenue sharing is not required for leasing in federal waters. The wealth would go to the oil companies, not to fishermen or locals.
- **Federal studies predict at least one major spill**, as well as a number of smaller spills, will occur, if drilling takes place. Recovery of spilled oil in Bristol Bay would be very difficult. Response technology has neither been developed nor tested in rough sea conditions, with ice and strong currents, all a part of the Bering Sea and Bristol Bay environment.
- **Seismic surveys** have been shown to dramatically reduce fish catch rates and can have significant, negative impacts on marine mammals, even before any oil or gas is extracted.
- **The sprawling foot of infrastructure required** for development - which involves pipelines, platforms, roads, worker housing, waste disposal facilities, oil and gas storage and processing facilities - would industrialize one of the most important ecological marine and coastal areas in the United States.
- **Experts have pointed to a dramatic lack of scientific information** needed to predict potential impacts of offshore drilling in the Bristol Bay region. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) recommended deleting Bristol Bay from the offshore leasing program calling it "unrealistically ambitious" because of the lack of available information to estimate or avoid impacts to important fisheries.
- **There are four national wildlife refuges (NWRs) in the region that could be affected by offshore oil and gas**

development: Alaska Peninsula NWR, Alaska Maritime NWR, Izembek NWR, and Togiak NWR. The proposed transportation route for getting oil and gas to the market calls for a pipeline through the Alaska Peninsula NWR, which provides habitat for salmon, waterfowl, wolf, wolverine, lynx, caribou, brown bears, and numerous other species. Izembek NWR, which contains some of the world's largest eelgrass beds and globally important wetlands providing habitat for millions of migratory birds, is directly adjacent to the proposed lease sale area.

- **Drilling in Bristol Bay is not the answer** to reducing high local or national energy prices. Renewable energy resources exist in Bristol Bay region that could provide long-term, sustainable, lower-cost energy to residents of the region, while creating jobs consistent with the fisheries-based economy. Our nation cannot drill our way to energy independence. We must aggressively pursue renewable energy technologies, and implement energy efficiency and conservation measures to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.