

Offshore Drilling in Bristol Bay & the Southeast Bering Sea: *Securing Permanent Protection for Alaska's 'Fish Basket'*



History of offshore drilling in Bristol Bay

1986	1989	1995	1998	2003	2007	2010
Lease Sale 92 is held offering 5.6 million acres in Bristol Bay and the southeast Bering Sea	Congress adds Bristol Bay to the offshore drilling moratorium after the Exxon Valdez oil spill.	The federal government finally reaches a buyback agreement with oil companies, paying over \$100 million in taxpayer money to repurchase Bristol Bay leases.	President Clinton extends the executive ban on offshore drilling to include Bristol Bay.	Congress removes Bristol Bay from the congressional moratorium on offshore drilling.	<p>January - Pres. Bush lifts the executive ban on drilling in Bristol Bay - ending all protection.</p> <p>July - The new 5-Year offshore leasing schedule is finalized; it includes a <u>Bristol Bay lease sale in 2011.</u></p>	Pres. Obama announces protection of Bristol Bay by Presidential withdrawal until 2017; cancelling the planned 2011 lease sale.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Offshore leasing is prohibited until 2017, after which Bristol Bay could again be opened for drilling.

In March 2010, Interior Sec. Salazar and Pres. Obama announced a landmark decision to cancel a lease sale scheduled to occur in 2011 (in the 5.6 million acre block shown in red on the map), and to reinstate presidential protections for the region until 2017. However, after 2017 leases can again be scheduled in Bristol Bay. History has demonstrated that pressure will undoubtedly be levied again to move forward with oil and gas exploration and development in Bristol Bay's rich waters. We must take advantage of the current momentum to finally achieve permanent protection so future generations of fishermen and Alaskans don't have to fight this same battle again.

Renewed and vocal support from fishermen and communities is needed to permanently protect Bristol Bay from offshore drilling.

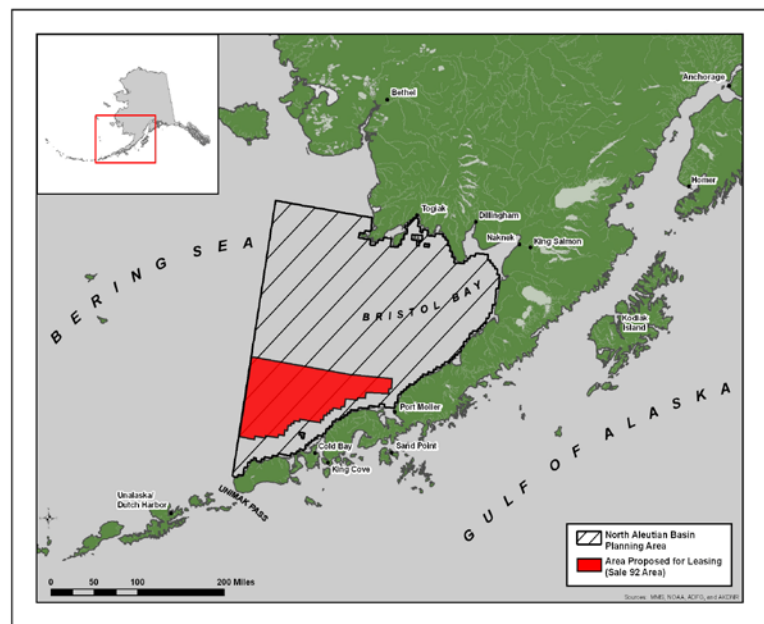
RISKS TO FISHERIES

The area of interest for oil and gas occurs at the heart of important fishing grounds and habitat for halibut, herring, salmon, crab, pollock, cod and flatfish (see area in red).

Federal studies have predicted at least one major oil spill and numerous smaller spills if development occurs.

Oil spills:

- Would travel north towards Bristol Bay in the summertime.
- Could harm multiple year classes of crab, salmon, & other fish as well as their prey, with potential population-level effects.
- Could degrade/contaminate nursery habitat for halibut in the area with potential effects on the North Pacific population.
- Could lead to the closure of multiple fisheries in the area.
- The potential for marketing, branding and increasing value for seafood products could be harmed over the long-term.
- Oil in sheltered, intertidal habitats that occur along much of the coastline could remain for more than 30 years.



Offshore seismic surveys utilize explosive blasts of air creating extreme underwater noise to locate oil and gas.

Seismic surveys:

- Have been shown in studies to significantly reduce catch rates for fish (more than 70% in some cases) for several days.
- May alter and/or delay salmon migration.
- Can kill fish eggs, larvae and adult fish within close proximity to the airgun source.
- May cause a variety of sublethal impacts to fish and crab such as damage to hearing and reproductive organs potentially resulting in reduced survival or reproductive success.
- May require fishermen to negotiate conflict avoidance agreements with the oil industry to avoid gear loss/tangling with seismic ships and equipment.

Offshore oil and gas operations in Bristol Bay would release thousands of tons of contaminated drilling muds and cuttings into the ocean.

Contaminated discharges:

- Can kill (by smothering or toxic exposure) or cause sublethal effects to fish eggs, fry and small prey in the mixing zone even at volumes permitted by the EPA.
- Can physically smother sedentary invertebrates like clams and scallops on the seafloor.
- Can contain a variety of contaminants including heavy metals such as mercury that bioaccumulate.
- May physically and chemically alter bottom habitats, making them less suitable as habitat for commercially important bottom-dwelling species.

Offshore oil and gas development requires extensive infrastructure that would degrade habitat reaching from miles offshore, into the coastal zone and onshore to freshwater.

The federal government created the following development scenario for the region that depicts the expansive footprint of offshore drilling:

- Six to eight offshore platforms
- Up to 20 exploration wells
- Up to 200 production wells
- Up to 150 miles of offshore pipeline
- Up to 50 miles of onshore pipeline
- Two pipeline landfalls
- Waste and oil/gas processing facility
- Multiple access roads for facilities and pipeline maintenance

TAKE ACTION FOR BRISTOL BAY!

Offshore leasing in Bristol Bay is still a significant threat. Though protection until 2017 is a great victory, renewed action to safeguard the future of Bristol Bay fisheries is vital while there is momentum and political will.

Now is the time to ensure lasting protections!

- **Write, call, or e-mail Secretary Salazar and elected officials:** The Secretary of Interior, Ken Salazar, has shown a readiness to listen and respond to the voices of fishermen and residents of the region. He understands the value of our fisheries, in terms of importance to our economies, livelihoods and culture. Please send him your thanks and urge him to support permanent protection.

For more information on submitting a thank you and contacting Secretary Salazar and Congress, go to: <http://www.akmarine.org/our-work/protect-bristol-bay/take-action>

- **Send letters to local newspapers:** Letters to the editor and longer opinion pieces in local papers are a great way to get your message on offshore drilling out there. Potential sources include the Bristol Bay Times, Kodiak Daily Mirror, Dutch Harbor Fishermen, Homer News, Anchorage Daily News, The Oregonian, and The Seattle Times. Visit our website for more information for tips and information.
- **Join the Bristol Bay offshore oil and gas listserv to stay informed and take timely action:**

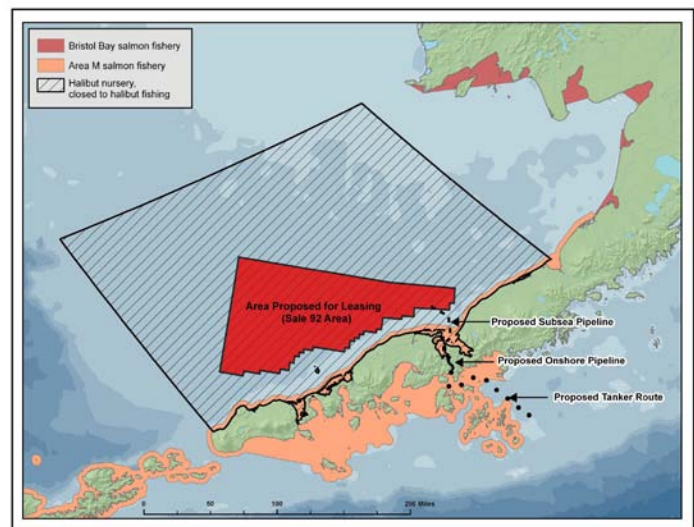
Send an e-mail to Julia@akmarine.org to join.

Infrastructure construction and emplacement:

- Would cause loss of access to fishing areas.
- Could result in gear damage or loss which may reduce fishing time, causing loss of income which fishermen may never be fully compensated for.
- Would degrade and/or destroy important nearshore fish habitat (halibut, salmon, crab, herring) in the Port Moller area and on the south side of the peninsula near Balboa Bay.
- Could impair the quality of freshwater salmon habitat on the Alaska Peninsula, potentially reducing production.
- May affect markets for fish harvested near infrastructure locations.
- Transporting oil and gas resources to market would involve tankers transiting in the Gulf of Alaska, south of Kodiak Island.

Bottom Line-

- **Benefits to fishermen and local residents: little to none.**
- **Potential impacts to fishermen and fisheries: substantial to devastating.**



For more information go to www.akmarine.org or contact Kelly Harrell or Dan Strickland at the Alaska Marine Conservation Council at (907) 277-5357.