

## Ten Reasons to

# *Protect Alaska's Bristol Bay*

## from Offshore Oil and Gas 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 within important migratory and feeding habitat for salmon from 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.



Photo: Andrew Henry



Photo: Emily Chenel

**Bristol Bay and southeastern Bering Sea waters support globally important commercial fisheries valued at more than \$2 billion dollars annually.** The area targeted for offshore oil and gas development overlaps with vital habitat and fishing grounds for salmon, red king crab, herring, halibut, pollock and cod. The region provides more than 40% of total U.S. fish catch and supports fishermen and fishing families throughout Alaska and the Pacific Northwest.

**Subsistence is the irreplaceable mainstay of Alaska Native tradition and culture.** Salmon is the life-blood of village economies and ways of life. In addition to salmon, southwestern Alaskan communities rely on halibut, herring, marine mammals and other ocean and coastal resources for their livelihoods. Impacts from offshore drilling would threaten these rich subsistence traditions.

**The Bering Sea ecosystem is already under stress from climate change.** Scientists have demonstrated that warming temperatures have already had significant and unprecedented effects on the southeast Bering Sea and Bristol Bay ecosystem including sea bird die-offs, rare algal blooms, declines in marine mammals and altered fish distribution. Increased ocean acidification, warmer ocean temperatures, disrupted oceanic production cycles, and warmer stream temperatures are expected to cause declines in productivity in the region over the next 30 years. Any further stress, such as offshore oil and gas activities, will exacerbate these threats to the integrity and resilience of the ecosystem.



Photo: David Cline, USFWS

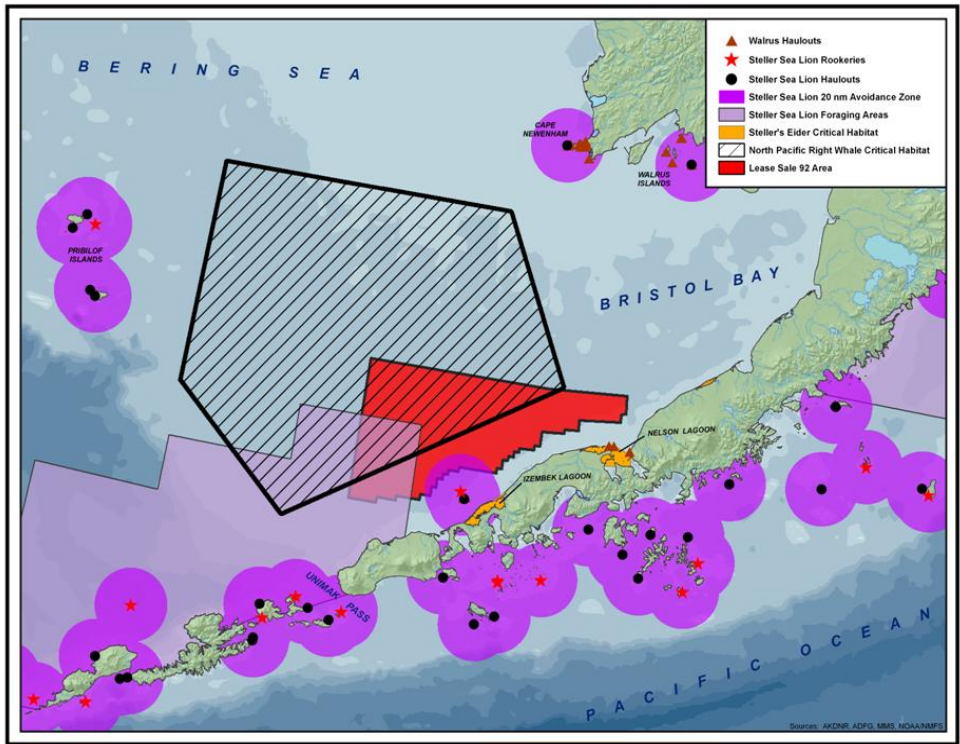


Photo: NOAA

**Federal studies suggest offshore oil and gas production in Bristol Bay would result in one or more major oil spills of more than 1,000 barrels and a number of smaller spills.** Recovery of spilled oil in Bristol Bay is unfeasible as clean-up technology is inadequate in rough sea conditions, ice, and strong tides and currents.

Offshore drilling in Bristol Bay would further threaten a number of endangered species including the world's most endangered whale- the North Pacific right whale- whose population is estimated to number less than 100 individuals. More than half of the area proposed for offshore development is designated critical habitat for this species.

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 that provide habitat for millions of migratory birds, is directly adjacent to the proposed lease sale area.



Map: Alaska Marine Conservation Council



Photos: USFWS

The economic benefits of *renewable* fisheries resources far outweigh the potential economic value of *nonrenewable* offshore oil and gas resources. The Minerals Management Service 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 pose risks to an estimated \$2 billion dollar annual wild fisheries economy.

We already determined that Bristol Bay is too sensitive 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. Protection has since been stripped away and leases are now proposed 2010 and 2012, but the great ecological, cultural, and economic risks remain.



Photo: Emily Chenel

**A broad spectrum of conservation, community, and fishing interests are all opposed to offshore drilling in Bristol Bay. Join us in calling on Congress to restore protection for this unique marine ecosystem.**

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