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## ***NOAA Lends Credence to Bristol Bay Protection Calls Comments Reinforce the Risks of Offshore Drilling in the Nation's 'Fish Basket'***

A strong supporter for deferring plans for offshore drilling in the ecological and economic fisheries powerhouse that is Alaska's Bristol Bay recently surfaced. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) submitted comments on September 21 on the proposed 5-Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2010-2015 that recommended reinstating presidential protections for Bristol Bay from offshore drilling.

"These comments represent a job well done by NOAA which has stewardship responsibilities for our nation's fisheries and living marine resources. Too often we have seen development proponents marginalize the tremendous value of Bristol Bay's renewable fisheries and the risks of offshore drilling amid these rich waters," said Kelly Harrell, Friends of Bristol Bay Project Director for the Alaska Marine Conservation Council.

NOAA's comments detail the lucrative commercial fisheries as well as extensive subsistence use of marine resources that takes place in Bristol Bay- home to the largest run of wild salmon in the world and source of 40% of the nation's seafood harvest. Additionally, the comments state that the Minerals Management Service (MMS) failed to adequately address the challenges of oil spill cleanup in Arctic and subarctic conditions.

"As a representative of an association of eight Bristol Bay Native Village corporations who oppose plans to drill in waters vital to our economic well being as well as our subsistence culture, I am proud to see clear recognition of the tremendous risks and challenges of offshore drilling here. NOAA stated what we have long known- that there is no place possibly in the world that has greater fisheries, protected species, or human use issues than this proposed sale area," said Terry Hoefflerle, Executive Director of Nunamta Aulukestai.

A lease sale is proposed for 2011 in a 5.6 million acre block of the region's waters at the heart of vital fishing grounds and fish habitat in the current 2007-2012 OCS Leasing Program. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is reviewing both the Alaska portions of that current program due to a law suit, as well as this potential new 2010-2015 program that was rushed through by the Bush administration just days before the former President left office.

NOAA's comments assert that, "The proposed timing for the first lease sale scheduled in the North Aleutian Basin (2011) would prevent acquisition of adequate and necessary baseline environmental information needed prior to any oil and gas activities in this area."

"We truly hope that the Obama administration's approach to offshore drilling and ocean policy is one that prioritizes protection of areas like Bristol Bay where the huge risks of drilling greatly outweigh the potential benefits. NOAA's comments, as well as those of several thousand Americans, a thousand Bristol Bay fishermen, and dozens of fishing groups and Native Villages and associations which all emphasize the need to set aside this marine treasure should be heeded," added Harrell.

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For more information including maps and fact sheets, go to: <http://www.akmarine.org/our-work/protect-bristol-bay>

Images are available at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bristolbay/>

For a copy of NOAA's comments go here: [http://www.peer.org/docs/noaa/09\\_12\\_10\\_NOAA\\_Comments\\_on\\_MMS\\_5\\_Year\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.peer.org/docs/noaa/09_12_10_NOAA_Comments_on_MMS_5_Year_Plan.pdf)