



March 5, 2018

Ms. Kelly Hammerle
Chief, National Oil and Gas Leasing Program
Development and Coordination Branch
Leasing Division, Office of Strategic Resources
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (VAM-LD)
45600 Woodland Road
Sterling, VA 20166

Re: Comments on the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management 2019-2024 Draft Proposed National Oil and Gas Leasing Program, Docket ID: BOEM-2017-0074

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

On behalf of the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners, I write in opposition to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) 2019-2024 Draft Proposed National Oil and Gas Leasing Program (DPP), and particularly in opposition to the plan to offer two leasing sales in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico. Charlotte County is located on the Southwest Gulf Coast of Florida with a population of over 170,000. The Eastern Gulf of Mexico is currently under a leasing moratorium for oil and gas development through 2022 and we support making that moratorium permanent.

While Charlotte County is pleased with Secretary Zinke's recent statement that Florida is no longer to be considered for leases in the program, we remain concerned about the impacts of oil and gas exploration through seismic surveys, as well as any subsequent offshore drilling in future years. Additionally, we are troubled by the recent testimony of the Acting Director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management in front of the House Committee on Natural Resources that Florida is still a part of the DPP, and the Secretary's statement is not an official part of the process.

The County is opposed to drilling in the Gulf of Mexico as a whole due to our experience with the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010. Given the known circulation pattern in the Gulf of Mexico, oil released into Gulf water, particularly the Eastern Gulf, can easily travel several hundred miles under the loop current and end up on Charlotte County's shoreline. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill has created long-term detrimental impacts on the Gulf of Mexico's ecosystem.

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Tourism generates over \$6.4 million in tax revenue for Charlotte County each year, with many visitors coming due to our beaches and pristine environment. In 2016, Charlotte County welcomed an estimated 406,700 visitors with an estimated \$552 million in overall economic impact. In addition to tourism, protecting the water quality and undersea environment of the Gulf of Mexico and adjacent waterways is critical to the commercial and recreational fishing industry. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reports that in 2017 alone, over 775,000 pounds of food and bait were caught by the commercial fishing industry off the shores of Charlotte County, with an estimated value of over \$926,672. In total, the commercial and recreational fisheries in West Florida have an economic impact of \$11.3 billion per year. The impacts of spills and even routine drilling operations would have a negative impact on live bottom communities, marine animals, and coastal habitats. Chronic exposure to oil and other residues related to oil and gas drilling can negatively impact the life cycle and food chain of commercial and recreational fish.

In addition to the economic and environmental impacts, drilling in the Eastern Gulf would negatively impact the nation's defense capabilities due to impacts on flight training and testing from the numerous bases in the Panhandle, MacDill Air Force Base in the Tampa Bay area, and Naval Air Station Key West.

The Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners is opposed to all oil and gas exploration, including seismic testing, in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and we urge you to honor Secretary Zinke's commitment to take Florida out of consideration for the program and eliminate these proposed leases in the next draft of the plan. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Tiseo".

Joseph M. Tiseo, Vice-Chair
Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners

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