



The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Comments on the 2019-2024 Draft Proposed National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We, the undersigned members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition, urge you to exempt ALL of the states on the Atlantic Coast – not just Florida - from offshore oil and gas drilling and development. This proposal would clearly endanger the nation's largest and most productive estuary, the Chesapeake Bay, but would also impact valuable estuaries, beaches, fisheries and tourism economies along the entire Atlantic seaboard.

In the Mid-Atlantic, we are keenly aware that any large spill, even one far smaller than the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster, could easily have disastrous consequences for Chesapeake Bay. For example, Chesapeake Bay is the largest source of blue crabs in the United States. Every year the entire next generation of crabs, in their larval stage, are swept into the Atlantic where they mature before making their way back into the Bay to repopulate the species. An oil spill at this time, when the entire future crab population is vulnerable, could wipe out this valuable economic resource. The crab population is also an integral part of the Bay's food chain and such an accident could imperil the future of the Bay ecosystem for a generation.

You have exempted Florida from this proposal because of its beaches and estuaries, but we want you to know that it is not unique. Florida is home to four estuaries that have been designated by Congress as having special national significance – though only one is on the Atlantic coastline. However, the rest of the Atlantic Coast, in addition to Chesapeake Bay, has 13 estuaries that are of special national significance and are protected through the National Estuary Program.

The valuable resources – beaches, estuaries, commercial and recreational fisheries, migratory birds and waterfowl, etc. – that abound on the Atlantic Coast are too valuable a resource to endanger by this poorly thought out proposal. This proposal is opposed by state and local governments up and down the Atlantic coast and local control and deference should lead you to listen to their concerns.

The Chesapeake Bay is also home to two of the largest ports on the East Coast, as well as to Naval Base Norfolk – the largest naval base in the world. Any large-scale offshore oil and gas drilling and development could disrupt commercial shipping from shore-based impacts and impede the readiness of our military - and a catastrophic spill in this area would inhibit the daily functions of this essential military base. The Blue Ribbon Finance Panel established under the Bush Administration concluded that the value of the Chesapeake Bay to the U.S. economy to be worth in excess of a trillion dollars – and that was more than a decade ago. This is a valuable resource and a national treasure that should not be trifled with.

We are very concerned about the potential catastrophic impacts to Chesapeake Bay, and other priceless areas along the Atlantic Coast. We urge you to exempt the entire Atlantic Coast from this shortsighted and dangerous proposal. Thank you.

Anacostia Watershed Society

Audubon Naturalist Society

Baltimore Tree Trust

Blue Heron Environmental Network

Blue Water Baltimore

Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Clean Fairfax Council

Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania

Delaware Nature Society

Earth Forum of Howard County

Friends of Accotink Creek

Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek

Friends of the Nanticoke River

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

Interfaith Power and Light (DC.MD.NoVa)

Lynnhaven River NOW

Maryland Conservation Council

Maryland Environmental Health Network

Maryland League of Conservation Voters

Mattawoman Watershed Society

Mehoopany Creek Watershed Association

National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Nature Abounds
Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust
PennFuture
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Rachel Carson Council
Richmond Audubon Society
Rivertown Coalition for Clean Air & Water
Rock Creek Conservancy
Rockbridge Area Conservation Council
Savage River Watershed Association
Severn Riverkeeper
ShoreRivers
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia Eastern Shorekeeper
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Waterkeepers Chesapeake