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Lawsuit seeks to halt oil drilling plans in Gulf, require full environmental review

By Associated Press
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NEW ORLEANS (AP) - An environmental group is asking a federal appellate court to halt 49 offshore drilling plans in the Gulf of Mexico that were approved without full environmental review.

The Center for Biological Diversity's lawsuit names Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and the Minerals Management Service, which oversees offshore oil and gas drilling leases.

It challenges exploration and drilling plans approved within the past 60 days that were exempted from full environmental analyses required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

BP received a similar exemption before a blowout on its Deepwater Horizon platform last month killed 11 workers and triggered a massive spill.

The lawsuit was filed Thursday in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.