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## **APNewsBreak: Feds approve new Gulf oil well off La**

By MIKE BAKER (AP)

Federal regulators approved Wednesday the first new Gulf of Mexico oil well since President Barack Obama lifted a brief ban on drilling in shallow water, even while deepwater projects remain frozen after the massive BP spill.

The Minerals Management Service granted a new drilling permit sought by Bandon Oil and Gas for a site about 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana and 115 feet below the ocean's surface. It's south of Rockefeller State Wildlife Refuge and Game Preserve, far to the west of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig that triggered the BP spill.

Obama last week extended a moratorium on wells in deep water like the BP one that blew out a mile below the surface in April and is gushing millions of gallons of oil. But at the same time, the president quietly allowed a three-week-old ban on drilling in shallow water to expire.

"I'm outraged," said Kieran Suckling, executive director for the Tucson, Ariz.-based Center for Biological Diversity. "How is it that shallow water drilling suddenly became safe again?"

Bandon Oil and Gas first sought the permit in April shortly after the Deepwater Horizon exploded and sank. The permit was approved Wednesday morning, according to MMS records.

Suckling said the administration was misleading the public by quietly resuming work in shallow waters while acting as if it was taking a tough look at deepwater work.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said in a news release Sunday that the extended moratorium on deepwater drilling was needed to provide time to implement new safety requirements.

"With the BP oil spill still growing in the Gulf, and investigations and reviews still under way, a six-month pause in drilling is needed, appropriate, and prudent," Salazar said. He said the term "deepwater" referred to drilling at depths of 500 feet or greater.

Frank Quimby, a spokesman for the Department of the Interior, said officials were comfortable with a variety of interim safety measures for shallow drilling, such as re-certification to ensure that blowout preventers will work properly. Officials plan to soon distribute a formal note to companies that outlines all the required actions.

"The interim safety measures, as long as they're completely adhered to, we feel that's enough for the shallow-water drilling to proceed under closer scrutiny and stepped-up inspections," Quimby said.