



THE SOUTHEAST TEXAS RECORD

Obama Administration accused of withholding gulf fracking records

David Yates
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In response to an unanswered public records request, an environmental agency turned to the courts Thursday in hopes of unearthing the extent of fracking currently taking place in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Center for Biological Diversity, a non-profit group dedicated to protecting all species from extinction, filed the complaint against the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, along with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, in the U.S. District Court for D.C.

The center accuses the governmental agencies of failing to issue a response to its Freedom of Information Request for records related to the extent of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) allowed in offshore oil and gas operations in the gulf.

“Fracking — a practice that involves blasting huge amounts of water and dangerous chemicals into the earth at enormous pressure to crack rock formations beneath the ocean floor — is inherently dangerous and has no place in fragile ocean ecosystems,” the complaint states. “Nevertheless, BSEE and BOEM have permitted fracking in the Gulf of Mexico.”

The environmental group believes the defendant agencies have authorized fracking for at least 115 wells in the gulf in 2013.

“But by failing to respond to the Center’s FOIA request, BSEE and BOEM are keeping the Center, its members and local communities in the dark about exactly where, when and how much fracking has occurred in the Gulf, in violation of FOIA’s clear legal mandates,” the complaint states.

“Accordingly, the Center seeks an order from the Court declaring BSEE and BOEM to be in violation of FOIA, and compelling BSEE and BOEM to provide responsive records to the Center without any further delay.”

According to the Environmental Defense Center, fracking has been conducted from platforms off California’s coast for 20 years, but until 2013 the fracking transpiring was largely unknown to state and federal regulators and the public.

The EDC has asked the Obama administration to place a moratorium on offshore fracking and other forms of well stimulation until the process is proven safe through a public and transparent comprehensive scientific review.

In its complaint, the Center for Biological Diversity contends on land fracking has been linked to chemical and oil spills, air and water pollution, earthquakes and property damage.

“The damages from fracking to public health and the environment have been severe,” the complaint states. “Offshore fracking prompts similar concerns.”

The center is seeking all records identifying wells in the gulf where fracking has been used since 1990.

Attorney Kristen Monsell is representing the center.

Case No. 1:15-cv-00022-ABJ