

# NEWSLINE

## Drilling slated for Arctic waters offshore Alaska in December

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July 13 (UPI) — Drilling by Italian energy company Eni is set for the Arctic waters off the coast of Alaska in December, the U.S. Interior Department announced.

“After a comprehensive review and consideration of comments received from the public, stakeholders, and Federal and state partner agencies and tribes, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management today conditionally approved a Beaufort Sea exploration plan it received from Eni U.S. Operating Co. Inc.,” the agency announced.

The BOEM is a division of the Interior Department.

In one of his final moves in office, former President Barack Obama used parts of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to ban oil and gas work in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas off the coast of Alaska, as well as Atlantic coast areas. President Donald Trump in April used executive action to review plans, which could undermine parts of the ban. When it was issued, environmentalists told UPI that the president doesn't have the authority to put lease considerations back on the table if there were already banned.



The Eni lease is in part of the Beaufort Sea not included in Obama's order.

The Italian energy company acquired leases more than a decade ago that would've expired by the end of the year without further action. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, the Trump administration rushed the leases through with little time for public comment.

“Approving this Arctic drilling plan at the 11th hour makes a dangerous project even riskier,” Kristen Monsell, an attorney with the center, said in a statement.

The Center for Biological Diversity and a group of other concerned parties filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration after his executive order was filed.

It's pending in a federal court in Alaska.

Eni in 2014 said it reached a production milestone of 25,000 barrels of oil per day at its Nikaitchuq field offshore Alaska. Development came from facilities built in part on an artificial island built by Eni in the Beaufort Sea.

“We know there are vast oil and gas resources under the Beaufort Sea, and we look forward to working with Eni in their efforts to tap into this energy potential,” Walter Cruickshank, acting BOEM director, said in a statement.

Drilling is slated for December and will be conducted only during winter months.