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Greens ask court to mandate Gulf of Mexico species review

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A coalition of environmental groups is heading to court over offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Gulf Restoration Network, Sierra Club and Center for Biological Diversity filed suit today to compel the Trump administration to review how drilling affects threatened and endangered species in the area.

“The Gulf of Mexico has long been written off as America’s dirty gas station, jeopardizing Gulf Coast communities, coastal economies, and thousands of whales, sea turtles, dolphins, oysters, and other wildlife that wind up in the path of oil and gas spills,” Earthjustice attorney Chris Amato, who is representing the groups, said in a statement.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida, alleges that NOAA Fisheries and the Fish and Wildlife Service have taken too long to complete a new consultation with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on how offshore drilling affects at-risk species.

The agencies’ most recent Endangered Species Act assessment for the Gulf ecosystem was in 2007. They launched a new review process after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill but have not yet completed it.

The environmental groups say the delay is unreasonable and unlawful.

“In the meantime, the Bureaus continue to authorize hundreds of oil and gas exploration, development, and production activities in the Gulf of Mexico each year, in reliance on the outdated 2007 consultation,” the lawsuit says.

The groups are asking the district court to order the agencies to finish the process within three months.

“For over 10 years, the federal agencies that are responsible for the protection of threatened and endangered species in the Gulf of Mexico have been sitting on their hands,” Gulf Restoration Network Executive Director Cynthia Sarthou said in a statement.

NOAA Fisheries and FWS declined to comment.