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Suit: Offshore drilling done in absence of required report

By KEVIN MCGILL, Associated Press June 21, 2018 Updated: June 21, 2018 4:10 p.m.

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Three conservation groups said in a lawsuit filed Thursday that federal wildlife agencies have failed for years to complete required consultations and reporting on the effects that oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico could have on endangered species.

The suit comes more than a decade since the last such report was done, and more than eight years since the huge 2010 BP oil spill, the groups said.

The Gulf Restoration Network, the Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity released a copy of their lawsuit as it was being filed in U.S. District Court in Florida. Defendants named are the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The suit says the Endangered Species Act requires those agencies since 2007 to consult with the agencies overseeing Gulf drilling and to publish an opinion on the possible effects of such drilling on endangered species, including various species of whales and sea turtles.

Such consultations and reporting haven't been conducted since well before the 2010 explosion of the BP-operated Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, a disaster that spilled millions of gallons into the Gulf, the lawsuit says. It added that the result is that hundreds of offshore oil and gas projects have been approved based on outdated information.

The lawsuit seeks an order requiring completion of a consultation in 90 days.

After the Deepwater Horizon disaster, which also killed 11 rig workers, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement decided a new consultation was needed and asked the two agencies to begin work on one in 2010, the suit says.