

<https://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2021/03/16/legal-petition-asks-biden-administration-extend-offshore-oil-leasing-halt>

Legal Petition Asks Biden Administration to Extend Offshore Oil Leasing Halt

Interior Secretary can issue five-year plan with no new leases

WASHINGTON - Conservation and Native American groups petitioned the Department of the Interior today to put a five-year block on the leasing of all federal waters for offshore oil and gas development. The petition cites climate change impacts, loss of biodiversity, and threats to coastal communities as urgent reasons for action.

The request follows President Biden's Jan. 27 [executive order](#) suspending fossil fuel leasing on all federal lands and oceans, pending a review that includes a [March 25 online forum](#). Today's petition offers a legal tool to extend that moratorium by suspending offshore lease sales for at least five years without any actions by Congress.

The [petition](#) says newly confirmed Interior Secretary Deb Haaland can issue a new five-year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program that includes no new leases in any offshore planning region. That would contrast sharply with the Trump administration's attempt to approve a [five-year program](#) that would have expanded offshore leasing into almost all U.S. oceans, which was [abandoned](#) in the face of widespread opposition and legal setbacks.

"The Biden administration is rightly concerned about offshore drilling's threats, and a five-year halt would be a strong next step," said Kristen Monsell, oceans legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "The time has come to boldly address the climate crisis and protect coastal communities and wildlife. We simply can't keep issuing long-term leases to plunder our oceans. Dirty and dangerous offshore drilling needs to be phased out, starting now."

The petition notes that Congress never intended for federal offshore leasing to continue forever. It cites the legislative history of the offshore leasing program, calling offshore drilling a temporary fix until new sources of energy are available, and a federal appellate court ruling allowing leasing delays because the "true costs of tapping OCS energy resources are better understood as more becomes known about the damaging effects of fossil fuel pollutants."

"The disconnect between science and policy in Alaska is glaring," said Bob Shavelson, advocacy director with Cook Inletkeeper. "On one hand we closed our Pacific cod fishery due to climate change, and on the other hand, we're pushing for more offshore oil and gas leasing in the very same area. We need to bring science back into the discussion."

The damaging effects of fossil fuel pollutants have become clear from record-breaking global temperatures, extreme weather events becoming more frequent and severe, rising seas and

coastal flooding, ocean warming and acidification, and degraded habitat, including the loss of Arctic sea ice relied on by polar bears and other endangered species.

“It’s time to begin our transition to renewable energy in a thoughtful and just way,” said Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of Healthy Gulf. “Existing leases will support oil and gas production in the Gulf for decades to come. We need to start the transition somewhere, and we think this is an important step.”

Peer-reviewed science [estimates](#) that a nationwide federal fossil fuel leasing ban would reduce carbon emissions by 280 million tons per year, ranking it among the most ambitious federal climate-policy proposals in recent years.

“We need to see the end of fossil fuel extraction and development in the outer continental shelf,” said Mati Waiya, executive director of Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation. “These practices have and continue to irreparably damage marine ecosystems and cultural fisheries. Indigenous communities are hit the hardest by the devastating consequences of climate change. Not only are our villages and cultural sites threatened by increasingly frequent environmental disasters, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise, but our lifeways, cultural keystone species and medicines are threatened with extinction by anthropogenic caused climate change. Too long have the Indigenous peoples of California had their culture and lifeways threatened by the aggressively colonialist fossil fuels industry.”

The petition was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Cook Inletkeeper, Healthy Gulf and Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation.