

<https://www.peninsulaclarion.com/news/comment-period-public-meetings-for-oil-and-gas-lease-sale-are-canceled/>

## **Comment period, public meetings for oil and gas lease sale are canceled**

With Biden's order pausing oil and gas lease sales, lower Cook Inlet sale is on hold

Following President Joe Biden's executive order pausing new oil and natural gas lease sales on federal lands, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management last Thursday announced it has canceled the public comment period on the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Cook Inlet Outer Continental Shelf Oil & Gas Lease Sale 258 in lower Cook Inlet.

The bureau also canceled virtual meetings scheduled for this meeting, according to a Feb. 4 press release.

On Jan. 27, Biden issued an executive order, "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," that directed federal agencies to pause new oil and natural gas leases "pending completion of a comprehensive review and reconsideration of Federal oil and gas permitting and leasing practices."

During his election campaign, Biden had said in his climate plan that he would ban new oil and gas permitting.

The proposed Lease Sale 258 includes 224 blocks in about 1 million acres of seafloor stretching from Kalgin Island in the north to Augustine Island in the south. Former President Donald Trump's administration had moved the lease sale forward just days before his term ended when the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management announced the availability of the draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Due to cancellation of the public comment period, the virtual meetings previously scheduled for February are also canceled.

Cook Inletkeeper, a Homer-based environmental nonprofit organization, had criticized the announcement of the draft Environmental Impact Statement, calling it "a Hail Mary to oil and gas companies." Last Thursday, Inletkeeper Advocacy Director Bob Shavelson praised the pause of the lease sale.

"It's refreshing to see science coming back into our federal decision making," Shavelson said in a press release. "Local people and businesses have opposed the industrialization of Lower Cook Inlet for decades, and BOEM has taken an important first step to heed those concerns."

Shavelson noted that Biden's executive order only pauses oil and gas leasing and does not cancel the proposed lease sale.

Another environmental group also spoke in favor of the pausing of the lease sale.

“This is a really encouraging sign that the Biden administration is honoring its promise to end dirty, dangerous offshore oil leasing,” Kristen Monsell, legal director of the Center for Biological Diversity’s Oceans program, said in a press release. “Safeguarding Cook Inlet from drilling will help our climate, and it’ll save critically endangered beluga whales from oil spills and noise pollution. Going forward, the administration should permanently protect the inlet and all our oceans from more offshore oil and gas drilling.”

Lease Sale 258 is part of the 2017-2022 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil & Gas Program that provided for a lease sale in federal submerged waters of Cook Inlet. A Federal Register notice formally canceling the comment period and public meetings is forthcoming. For more information on the proposed lease sale, visit [www.boem.gov/ak258](http://www.boem.gov/ak258)