



MEDIA RELEASE

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SIERRA CLUB DENOUNCES FIVE YEAR OFFSHORE LEASING PLAN

NEW ORLEANS – On the eve of a hearing to be held by the Mineral Management Service (MMS) in New Orleans, the Sierra Club - Delta Chapter has announced its opposition to the MMS proposed plan for offshore drilling. The MMS plan would open vast new areas of America's coasts to oil and gas drilling over the next five years. The group calls instead for better energy solutions that will ensure that coastal economies are protected.

“This new offshore leasing plan would open up two million acres in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico, and prepare for leasing in areas that currently have a moratorium, like Virginia's coast and Alaska's famous salmon fishing grounds in Bristol Bay,” says Leslie March, chair of the Sierra Club – Delta Chapter in Louisiana. “Here in Louisiana, we know that offshore drilling creates huge damage and impact onshore, and we know that neither the federal government nor the big oil corporations are willing to pay to repair that damage. The Minerals Management Service should withdraw this proposal for drilling.”

“Let's be clear,” says March. “This plan will not lower gas prices at the pump. But it will allow the oil companies to continue to destroy America's special coastal places in their pursuit of ever higher profits.”

Onshore impacts of offshore drilling include destruction of fragile coastal ecosystems for pipelines, docks, and receiving facilities; an onshore network of roads, buildings, and other infrastructure; water pollution from drilling operations that includes lead, mercury, and other heavy metals; and significant air pollution from offshore drilling locations. A large portion of Louisiana's coastal land loss, estimated at 25 square miles per year, has been attributed to oil and gas exploration and production.

In addition, the group points to recent lawsuits filed by oil corporations against the federal government over drilling incentives known as ‘royalty relief.’

“Now, the big oil corporations don't even want to pay royalties to the federal government for the oil and gas that they find on federal leases,” says March. “Even with the price of oil at record highs, they expect to enjoy incentives that were put in place for times when the price of oil was at its lowest. Even if Louisiana were able to get a portion of federal royalty revenues to repair our wetlands, it would be a cruel joke. If the oil corporations get their way, there won't be any revenues to share.”

The group pointed instead to real energy solutions that would actually reduce America's dependence on oil.

“Making our cars go farther on a gallon of gas would save more oil than we expect to find by drilling the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,” explains March. “We need to wring the benefits from energy efficiency, renewable resources like solar power, and policies that ensure that our children are free from air and water pollution.”

“Especially after Katrina, we know that strong coastal ecosystems protect our families and support our coastal economies,” says March. “Opening more of America's pristine coasts to the ravages of offshore drilling would sacrifice a treasure that will benefit us for generations to come, for the obscene short-term profits of a few oil corporations.”

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The Sierra Club's 700,000 members work together to protect communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Delta (Louisiana) chapter of the Sierra Club has more than 3,500 members and has been active in local conservation projects for more than 30 years. For more information, contact the organization's website: www.louisiana.sierraclub.org.