



January 28, 2019

The Honorable Michael Dembrow
Environment and Natural Resources, Chair
900 Court St. NE, S-407

RE: Support Senate Bill 256, Offshore oil and gas drilling moratorium

Dear Senator Dembrow and Environment and Natural Resources Committee Members:

On behalf the Audubon Society of Portland representing over 15,000 members we are writing in support of Senate Bill 256 that aims to protect coastal communities and ocean resources from the risks of offshore oil and gas development. Offshore drilling is a highly risky proposition that has the potential to devastate our ocean, coastal communities, and marine wildlife that depend on a healthy ecosystem. Oregon's coastal waters support millions of seabirds, important marine mammal migration routes, commercially important fisheries, as well as tourism and recreation. Offshore oil and gas development in Oregon state and offshore waters would require seismic surveys, drilling operations, oil transport by tankers, and the installation of platforms, pipelines, and other infrastructure. Collectively these activities would significantly damage the environment, marine wildlife, and coastal economies and ways of life. Offshore drilling would also expose the marine environment and coastal communities to the risks of another catastrophic oil spill.

The risks to Oregon's marine ecosystem

Oregon's marine waters are at a pivotal location within the California Current Ecosystem (CCE), an upwelling biome ecosystem spanning North America's West Coast that is one of the most productive ecosystems in the world ocean. Disturbances associated with oil exploration and development can negatively impact marine mammals¹ and other marine life². A large disruption (i.e. large oil spill) in the CCE in Oregon or Northwest waters would likely have CCE-wide ecological impacts that could take decades or more for ecosystem recovery and would result in billions of dollars of damage in ecosystem services.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/19/586061334/seismic-surveys-planned-off-u-s-coast-pose-risk-to-marine-life>

² Aguilar de Soto, N., Delorme, N., Atkins, J., Howard, S., Williams, J. and Johnson, M. 2013. Anthropogenic noise causes body malformations and delays development in marine larvae. *Scientific Reports* 3: 2831 DOI: 10.1038/srep02831.

<https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/mar/mcbem-2014-01/other/mcbem-2014-01-submission-seismic-airgun-en.pdf>

Oregon's marine environment and coastline is host to important congregations of marine life that live year round or migrate to these productive waters. The Audubon network has identified 37 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) along Oregon's coast (see map below). IBAs are internationally recognized sites with exceptional importance to the conservation of bird populations. Oregon's coast supports over 1.3 million breeding colonial nesting seabirds representing over half of the breeding colonial seabirds on the entire West Coast³.

Small vulnerable populations of some bird species that depend on the marine environment would be placed in extreme danger. As a case in point, the black oystercatcher, a shorebird species that depends entirely on the intertidal zone and listed as a species of conservation concern in Oregon⁴ would be extremely vulnerable to extirpation in the state if a catastrophic oil spill were to occur. The most recent black oystercatcher population estimate indicates a small population in Oregon of approximately 500-600 individuals⁵ that is extremely vulnerable to environmental impacts. The marbled murrelet, a species listed as Threatened under the federal and Oregon Endangered Species Act (ESA), depends on coastal waters for its food (small forage fish species). A significant impact to this species' low Oregon population could tip it toward oblivion as it is already in danger of extinction in Oregon within this century⁶.

Marine mammals like the gray whale migrate along the West Coast twice every year between winter breeding grounds in Baja California and summer feeding areas in Alaska. Noises associated with oil and gas exploration surveys can affect whales up to 3 kilometers away⁷ and a catastrophic oil spill would essentially block gray whale migratory routes up the West Coast.

Nearshore species of conservation concern⁸ including many slow growing rockfish species, Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, forage fish species (e.g. eulachon, anchovies, smelt, sand lance), lingcod, and many others would be impacted by oil exploration, development, and oil spills.

The risks to Oregon's coastal economy

Oregon's commercial fishing industry contributed over \$500 million in personal income in 2016 with an economic impact of over \$2 billion.⁹ Commercially important fisheries in Oregon, including Dungeness crab, salmon species, Pacific halibut, Pacific sardine, species, and many others would suffer immensely in the event of a sizable oil spill.

³ <https://nctc.fws.gov/resources/knowledge-resources/pdf/Oregon-Catalog-seabirds.pdf>

⁴ <http://oregonconservationstrategy.org/strategy-species/black-oystercatcher/>

⁵ <http://audubonportland.org/files/citizen-science/updated-black-oystercatcher-report-2016>

⁶ McShane, C., T. Hamer, H. Carter, G. Swartzman, V. Friesen, D. Ainley, R. Tressler, K. Nelson, A. Burger, L. Spear, T. Mohagen, R. Martin, L. Henkel, K. Prindle, C. Strong, and J. Keany. 2004. Evaluation report for the 5-year status review of the marbled murrelet in Washington, Oregon, and California. Unpublished Report. EDAW Inc., Seattle, Washington. Prepared for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1. Portland OR.

⁷ Rebecca A. Dunlop, Michael J. Noad, Robert D. McCauley, Lindsay Scott-Hayward, Eric Kniest, Robert Slade, David Paton, Douglas H. Cato. 2017, Determining the behavioural dose-response relationship of marine mammals to air gun noise and source proximity. *Journal of Experimental Biology* 2017 220: 2878-2886; doi: 10.1242/jeb.160192

⁸ <http://oregonconservationstrategy.org/oregon-nearshore-strategy/species/>

⁹ ODFW, "Oregon's Ocean Commercial Fisheries,"

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/mrp/docs/Backgrounder_Comm_Fishing.pdf

Recreational sport fishing also contributes tens of millions of dollars (\$68.9 million in 2014) of total personal income to Oregon's coastal economies.¹⁰ Coastal tourism in Oregon supports over 20,000 jobs and generates \$1.9 billion in revenues annually. Coastal sportfishing and recreation opportunities depend on clean beaches and waters, abundant wildlife, and scenic view sheds – all of which would be compromised by offshore drilling. An oil spill off of our shores would jeopardize jobs in the commercial, recreational fishing, and recreation-based tourism economies of Oregon.

Exploiting Oregon's meager oil/gas potential is not worth the risk

Exploratory surveys off Oregon in the 1970s and 80s revealed very limited fossil fuel reserves. Oregon's Geology and Mining Department (DOGAMI) states that it is unlikely oil drilling will be productive or feasible off Oregon's Coast. In fact, existing information indicates that oil and gas resources off Oregon and Washington combined are minimal and production would supply the nation with oil for only 15 days.

We are all too familiar with massive oil spills and the ensuing carnage in our own country as well. It is impossible to prevent accidents no matter what the precaution as we saw most recently with the catastrophic 2010 Deep Water Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico. A sizeable spill anywhere along our shared coast would have a devastating impact on our population, recreation, natural resources, and our ocean and coastal-dependent economies. These risks are amplified by the proximity of Cascadia Subduction Zone just offshore in the Pacific Northwest, which is one of the most hazardous seismic zones in North America. A large scale earthquake would be damaging to offshore drilling installations.

Moreover, in this time of changing climate, we need to move away from fossil fuel dependence and strive towards a more sustainable and secure clean energy economy.

Follow a sustainable pathway

Oregon has a long history of opposition to efforts to lease oil and gas areas in Oregon OCS waters and has supported the congressional moratorium on oil and gas leasing on the OCS of the West Coast since 1990. Oregonians have consistently made it known that their priority is long-term use and protection of renewable resources which is exemplified in Oregon's Statewide Land use Planning Goal 19 which states, "To conserve marine resources and ecological functions for the purpose of providing long-term ecological, economic, and social value and benefits to future generations." Senate Bill 256 is in line with these values cherished by Oregonians.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Joe Liebezeit, MS, Staff Scientist
Bob Sallinger, Conservation Director
Paul Engelmeyer, Tenmile Creek Sanctuary Manager

¹⁰ ODFW, "Oregon Marine Recreational Fisheries Economic Contributions In 2013 and 2014."
http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/docs/ODFW_Marine_Rec_Ec_Effects_2013-2014.pdf



Oregon's coastal Important Bird Areas