



NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

May 17, 2006

Dear Representative:

We urge you to protect our beaches and environmentally sensitive coastal areas by supporting the Putnam-Capps-Jim Davis-Foley-Bill Young-Pallone amendment to the Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill. The amendment restores the bi-partisan moratorium on offshore drilling that has been in place for the past twenty-five years and was removed during mark-up.

If the offshore drilling moratorium is not restored, drilling would be allowed as close as 3 miles offshore from our coasts. More than 100 million Americans visit our ocean beaches every year. Drilling off our beaches would mean toxic air and water pollution, tar balls and oil spill threats on a daily basis. These impacts would threaten multi-billion dollar tourism industries and endanger environmentally sensitive coastal areas, such as estuaries and marshes.

There are, however, faster, cheaper and cleaner energy alternatives than drilling. According to recent analysis by NRDC, a combination of energy efficiency policies would achieve over 300 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of natural gas savings over the next fifty years. These savings are nearly four times greater than the amount of gas the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service estimates is technically recoverable in protected offshore areas (about 86 TCF). A 2005 American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy report found that a combination of energy efficiency and renewable energy policies would save 6.9 TCF of gas by 2013, which is far more gas than could be obtained from protected offshore areas by that date.

Offshore drilling also has serious environmental impacts. According to the Department of Interior, some 3 million gallons of oil spilled from offshore oil and gas operations in 73 incidents between 1980 and 1999. Offshore drilling operations generate massive amounts of toxic waste, an average of 180,000 gallons per well. They dump most of this untreated waste into the water. Drilling an average exploration well generates some 50 tons of nitrogen oxides (NOx), 13 tons of carbon monoxide, 6 tons of sulfur dioxide, and 5 tons of volatile organic hydrocarbons annually. Each offshore platform generates more than 50 tons of NOx, 11 tons of carbon monoxide, 8 tons of sulfur dioxide and 38 tons of volatile organic hydrocarbons every year. Seismic exploration – explosive blasts that map sub-sea rock formations to locate oil and gas – can be devastating to marine mammals. Onshore pipelines and industrial facilities associated with offshore oil or gas development can cause significant damage to coastal habitat, including wetlands, and also can harm coastal economies that rely on tourism, recreation and fishing.

Our country could do far more to reduce its dependence on oil and natural gas through clean energy alternatives. We should pursue these alternatives instead of harming our nation's beaches and environmentally sensitive coastal areas by lifting the offshore drilling moratorium. Please protect our coasts by supporting the Capps-Jim Davis-Foley-Bill Young-Pallone amendment.

Sincerely,


Karen Wayland
Legislative Director