

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

April 24, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We write in strong opposition to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) March 30th publication of a Call for Information and Nominations (Call) for a potential oil and gas lease sale in the Beaufort Sea in 2019. This attempt to fast-track dangerous and unpopular oil drilling in vulnerable Arctic waters ignores ongoing legal action regarding permanent protections in the region, and will likely end up wasting taxpayer funds and agency resources. We urge you to immediately cease any efforts to schedule and plan for a lease sale in the Beaufort Sea in 2019.

As BOEM itself previously recognized in excluding the region entirely from offshore oil leasing in the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program, the harsh and fragile Arctic Ocean is incompatible with expanded offshore drilling. A major oil spill in this unique ecosystem would occur more than a thousand miles from the nearest Coast Guard station, with the threat of sea ice in all seasons, subzero temperatures, storms, fog, and complete darkness up to 20 hours a day. BOEM's own analysis of adjacent areas of the Arctic Ocean estimated a 75 percent likelihood of a spill if drilling took place. As the U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Paul Zukunft reiterated last summer, there are no effective means to respond to or clean up an oil spill in the Arctic's harsh and remote conditions.

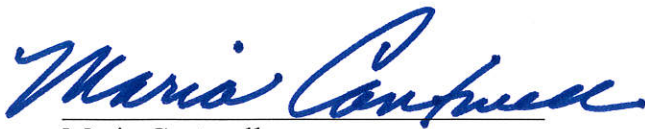
Offshore oil leasing is also accompanied by seismic surveying, a large-scale industrial activity that can blanket thousands of miles of ocean with deafening blasts that harass and harm thousands of sensitive marine mammals. The National Marine Fisheries Service estimated that a single two-month-long seismic survey in 2012 in the Arctic Ocean would disturb over 60,000 ringed seals and 4,600 beluga whales, which rely on Arctic waters to feed, birth, and rear their young.

Further, expanding offshore drilling in the Arctic Ocean undermines urgently needed action to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change. As last year's report by the U.S. Global Change Research Program confirms, the world must substantially reduce net global carbon dioxide emissions prior to 2040 relative to present-day values to keep warming below two degrees Celsius and avoid the worst effects of climate change. Expanding oil development in frontier regions like the Arctic Ocean, where any oil would not come to market for decades even if it were discovered and could be developed safely, harms our nation's urgent need to transition to a low-carbon future.

Finally, President Obama's protection of most of the Beaufort Sea in December 2017 was meant to be permanent, and President Trump's attempt to undo this protection last year is potentially unlawful and currently being litigated. Given that it is a waste of resources to plan for a lease sale in an area that is likely still protected under the OCS Lands Act, it was irresponsible to include a potential 2019 Beaufort Sea lease sale in the 2019-2024 Draft Proposed OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program, and the issuance of a Call for that sale last month doubles down on that flawed decision.

We urge you to abandon the Department's plans to remove the crucial protections for the Arctic Ocean put into place by President Obama and supported by sound science and millions of Americans, and cancel efforts to prepare for a lease sale in the Beaufort Sea.

Sincerely,



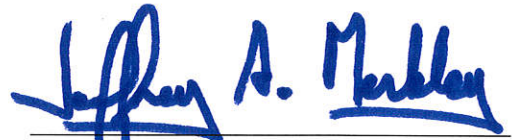
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

cc: Walter Cruickshank, Acting Director, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management