

43. Adopt resolution opposing new and existing offshore oil and gas drilling, and take related actions ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Board of Supervisors - Third District and Second District

Subject: Resolution Opposing New and Existing Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling

Meeting Date: June 10, 2025

Formal Title: Adopt resolution opposing new and existing offshore oil and gas drilling, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Adopt resolution opposing new and existing offshore oil and gas drilling; and
2. Direct the Chair to submit a public comment on behalf of the Board to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) strongly opposing the inclusion of any areas off the California coast—particularly the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary—in the 11th National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Executive Summary

The National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program has initiated a public comment period open through June 16, 2025. While no specific lease areas have been proposed, the RFI includes all 27 OCS planning areas—including those currently protected from leasing, such as the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Though Monterey Bay remains protected under a 2008 presidential order, the inclusion of currently off-limits areas signals a potential policy shift and warrants a clear and unified response from California communities. The County should oppose any offshore oil and gas development and advocate for the continued protection of vital marine ecosystems.

Discussion

Historical Context: Widespread Opposition to Offshore Oil Drilling

The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill and the 2015 Refugio pipeline rupture caused devastating ecological, recreational, and economic harm. These events galvanized public opposition to offshore oil drilling, particularly along the California coast. Santa Cruz County has often been at the forefront of these efforts. Notably, in the late 1970s, when the Carter Administration proposed opening new oil and gas leases, Santa Cruz—under the leadership of Supervisor Gary Patton—helped launch a coastwide community campaign that ultimately contributed to a national moratorium on offshore drilling.

Over the years, sustained public education and advocacy have built broad support for ocean protection. These efforts have led to the creation of federal marine sanctuaries, state marine reserves, and other protective designations. Alongside these protections, voters and elected officials have repeatedly acted to prohibit oil and gas development in coastal waters. Examples include:

- In 2014 and 2017, West Coast governors issued formal statements opposing the

inclusion of any offshore oil and gas lease sales.

- In May 2025, a coalition of 15 Democratic state attorney generals, including California's, filed suit against President Trump's declaration of a national energy emergency, which sought to fast-track oil and gas projects by bypassing environmental reviews.
- At least 65 California cities and counties, representing over 21 million residents—more than half the state's population—have taken formal action opposing new offshore fossil fuel leasing.
- 27 of these jurisdictions, including Santa Cruz County, have enacted measures prohibiting onshore support facilities for offshore drilling without voter approval. Santa Cruz County voters passed such a measure in 1985 with 82% support.

These actions reflect not only the leadership of state and local governments but also the consistent will of the people. A 2022 poll by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation found that 80% of Americans support protecting marine areas with environmental, cultural, or educational significance.

Recent Federal Action on Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration

Section 388 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 prohibits oil and gas leasing in areas protected by a moratorium, including federally designated marine sanctuaries. Despite this, the Trump Administration is attempting to reopen federal waters for offshore oil and gas development. The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has issued a Request for Information (RFI) that includes areas adjacent to or within marine sanctuaries such as the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS). Spanning 6,094 square miles, the MBNMS protects iconic ecosystems including the Monterey Canyon and kelp forests—critical habitats for species like the California sea otter.

While the RFI does not propose specific lease sales, it seeks public input on all Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) areas, including currently off-limits regions like the MBNMS. By signaling that such protected areas may be reconsidered for leasing, the RFI departs from long-standing practice and threatens to erode hard-won environmental protections.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Offshore drilling poses significant risks to marine life, increases the likelihood of oil spills, and undermines California's climate goals and transition to renewable energy. Oceans play a vital role in regulating climate, producing oxygen, and sustaining global biodiversity. Marine sanctuaries like the MBNMS are essential for conservation, public education, and climate resilience.

The proposed 11th OCS Leasing Program, as currently outlined, threatens the future of

our coastal ecosystems, local economies, and climate leadership. The inclusion of protected areas in the planning process is deeply concerning.

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors submit public comments to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management:

- Opposing any new offshore oil and gas development in California;
- Defending the integrity of marine sanctuaries from rollback efforts; and
- Affirming strong support for transitioning away from fossil fuels and toward sustainable energy alternatives.

Financial Impact

The recommended actions do not have a financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Sustainable Environment

Submitted By:

Justin Cummings, Third District Supervisor and Kimberly De Serpa, Second District Supervisor

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.

BEFORE THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
OF THE COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

RESOLUTION NO. _____

On the motion of Supervisor:
Duly seconded by Supervisor:

The following resolution is adopted:

RESOLUTION OPPOSING NEW AND EXISTING
OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS DRILLING

WHEREAS, the ocean covers roughly 70% of the Earth's surface; produces half the oxygen we breathe through its plant life; serves as a major highway for global trade; provides food; absorbs excess carbon from climate change; and plays a critical role in shaping weather patterns; and

WHEREAS, offshore drilling carries countless negative effects including air pollution from toxic emissions known to cause asthma, lung cancer and other diseases, the threat of oil spills which would do harm to wildlife and their habitats and damage the fishing and tourism industries, the latter of which generates \$4.3 billion in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties; and

WHEREAS, the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster killed 11 people, spilled over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, devastated coastal economies, caused nearly \$1 billion in seafood industry losses, tarred shorelines from Texas to Florida, and had deadly impacts on dolphins, whales, sea turtles, and other wildlife; and

WHEREAS, an analysis by Oceana found that protecting all unleased federal waters from offshore drilling in the United States could prevent over 19 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions - the equivalent of taking every car in the nation off the road for 15 years; and

WHEREAS, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary was designated on September 18, 1992, with a statutory ban on offshore oil development under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, and in November 2008 it was expanded to include the Davidson Seamount Management Zone—75 miles west of San Simeon—where nutrient-rich upwelling around the 7,500-foot-tall seamount supports diverse marine life, including corals, sponges, plants, and abundant fish; and

WHEREAS, despite widespread opposition in Pacific Coast states, the Trump administration's 2018 five-year offshore leasing plan proposed opening

Resolution _____

the entire West Coast to new drilling and, although courts blocked the proposal, the threat persists due to the absence of a permanent federal ban; and

WHEREAS, President Biden finalized the 2024–2029 Five-Year Plan and, in January 2025, used Section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to permanently withdraw 625 million acres of federal waters from leasing—including areas off the East and West Coasts, Eastern Gulf of Mexico, and parts of the Arctic—an action the Trump Administration immediately attempted to revoke despite lacking clear authority under the Act; and

WHEREAS, on April 18, 2025, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) announced plans to develop a new National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Program, starting with an April 30 Request for Information and a 45-day public comment period ending June 16, 2025, to gather input on offshore drilling; and

WHEREAS the area between the southern boundary of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the northern boundary of Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary remains unprotected, including Morro Bay, Cayucos, Montana De Oro State Park, and Morro Rock, which is sacred to the Chumash and Salinan peoples; and

WHEREAS, support from Santa Cruz County will help oppose this and any future efforts toward offshore drilling in the Pacific Ocean and elsewhere.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Cruz opposes any new and existing offshore oil and gas drilling and will submit comments to that effect in response to BOEM's OCS Five Year Plan RFI.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Cruz, State of California, this _____ day of _____, 20____, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Felipe Hernandez
Chair of the Board of Supervisors

Resolution _____

ATTEST: _____

Juliette Rezzato
Clerk of the Board

Approved as to Form:

Signed by:

Jason M. Heath 6/4/2025

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Jason M. Heath (06/03/2025, 25-1910)
Office of the County Counsel

Certificate Of Completion

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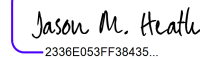
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County Counsel

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Electronic Record and Signature Disclosure:

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Status

Timestamps

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6/3/2025 5:21:00 PM

Certified Delivered

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6/4/2025 8:25:06 AM

Signing Complete

Security Checked

6/4/2025 8:28:55 AM

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6/4/2025 8:28:55 AM

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To let us know of a change in your email address where we should send notices and disclosures electronically to you, you must send an email message to us at nada.algharib@santacruzcounty.us and in the body of such request you must state: your previous email address, your new email address. We do not require any other information from you to change your email address.

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Ms. Kelly Hammerle
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (VAM-LD)
45600 Woodland Road
Sterling, VA 20166-9216

Re: Comments for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Request for Information (RFI) on the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program
Docket No. BOEM–2024–0022

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors strongly opposes the inclusion of Pacific Coast planning areas in the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) Request for Information (RFI) for the 11th National Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program. This RFI, initiated under Executive Order 14154, "Unleashing American Energy," proposes expanded fossil fuel development on federal lands and waters, including areas currently protected by law—such as the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS).

Although the RFI does not name specific lease areas, it invites comment on all 27 OCS planning regions, including those withdrawn from leasing through presidential or congressional action. This signals a troubling departure from longstanding bipartisan commitments to protect fragile marine ecosystems and undermines the legal framework established by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Must Remain Off-Limits

Designated in 1992 to prevent offshore oil development, the MBNMS spans more than 6,000 square miles and includes some of the most ecologically diverse marine environments in the United States. It encompasses the Monterey Submarine Canyon, Davidson Seamount, extensive kelp forests, and critical habitats for marine mammals and endangered species. The sanctuary supports a \$4.4 billion tourism and fishing economy across Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties and is a vital hub for scientific research, education, and conservation.

To consider opening this sanctuary—or others like it—to oil and gas leasing is not only unlawful but an affront to the communities that have worked tirelessly to preserve these resources for future generations.

Drilling in Marine Sanctuaries Is Prohibited by Federal Law

Federal law explicitly prohibits new offshore oil and gas leasing in national marine sanctuaries. Section 388 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and sanctuary regulations (15 C.F.R. § 922.132 and § 922.232) bar such activities. Any leasing proposal that includes sanctuaries like Monterey Bay, Channel Islands, or Chumash Heritage would violate these clear legal protections.

Offshore Drilling Undermines Climate and Environmental Goals

Expanding offshore fossil fuel development directly contradicts national and global climate goals. Oceana estimates that permanently protecting unleased federal waters could prevent more than 19 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions—equivalent to taking every U.S. car off

the road for 15 years. This proposal moves in the wrong direction at a time when we must urgently accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

Oil Spills Pose Ongoing and Unacceptable Risks

Offshore drilling carries inherent risks of spills and pollution. The Deepwater Horizon disaster released more than 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, causing extensive ecological and economic harm. California's Central Coast is home to vulnerable ecosystems and coastal economies that cannot afford such devastation.

Unprotected Coastal Areas Also Need Safeguards

The region between the Monterey Bay and Chumash Heritage sanctuaries—including Morro Bay, Cayucos, and Montana de Oro State Park—remains unprotected yet ecologically and culturally vital. These areas contain sensitive marine habitats and sacred sites such as Morro Rock, revered by the Chumash and Salinan peoples. These landscapes deserve permanent protection.

Public Opposition Is Deep, Widespread, and Longstanding

Communities along the Pacific Coast have consistently opposed offshore oil drilling for over 50 years. Major oil spills—including the 1969 Santa Barbara disaster and the 2015 Refugio pipeline rupture—have fueled strong public resistance, reflected in numerous local, state, and federal actions. In Santa Cruz County, a grassroots campaign in the 1970s helped secure a national moratorium on offshore drilling, and a 1985 county ordinance—requiring voter approval for onshore support facilities—passed with 82% public support.

Today, this opposition remains unwavering. When the Trump Administration proposed expanded drilling in 2018, it was met with broad and immediate backlash, leading to the plan's withdrawal. In 2025, a coalition of 15 Democratic state attorneys general, including California's, filed suit to stop fossil fuel projects that bypass environmental review.

More than 65 cities and counties in California, representing over 21 million residents, have formally opposed new offshore oil leases. In 2014 and 2017, West Coast governors jointly affirmed their opposition. A 2022 survey by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation found that 80% of Americans support protecting marine areas for their environmental, educational, and cultural value.

Conclusion and Request

From decades of community organizing to recent legal challenges, the message is clear: offshore oil drilling has no place off the Pacific Coast. BOEM must remove all Pacific planning areas from consideration in the 2024–2029 Five-Year Program and reaffirm that national marine sanctuaries are permanently off-limits to oil and gas development.

Our ocean is central to our economy, identity, and climate resilience. We urge BOEM to reject any new offshore oil and gas leasing—particularly in or near national marine sanctuaries—and

to uphold the protections that Californians and coastal communities across the country have long fought to defend.

Respectfully submitted,

Chair Felipe Hernandez

On behalf of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors