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Communities Sound the Alarm Over New Federal Offshore Drilling Plan for Cook Inlet

***Five new oil and gas lease sales proposed for Cook Inlet under the federal
offshore leasing plan***

HOMER, AK — Cook Inletkeeper denounced the federal government's draft 11th Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) 5-year plan, which proposes five new oil and gas lease sales in Lower Cook Inlet between 2027 and 2031. The draft plan proposes opening approximately 1.27 billion acres of public waters nationwide for oil and gas development across the U.S. Pacific coast, the Gulf of Mexico, and nearly all regions of Alaska's coastal waters. The Cook Inlet sales are part of a broader sequence of lease sales proposed for the region over the coming decade. With twenty-one lease sales proposed in Alaska waters, from the Gulf of Alaska to the High Arctic — including five in Lower Cook Inlet — the plan would open areas of Alaska that have seen little or no prior offshore oil and gas leasing activity, intensifying industrial pressure on sensitive coastal ecosystems, fisheries, and the communities that rely on them.

Although the existing 5-year plan wasn't set to expire until 2029, it did not align with the Trump administration's overtly pro-oil approach. BOEM threw the plan out and now [proposes opening extensive](#) areas of Alaska's coastal waters — 21 total leases from Southeast to the Arctic — to industrial development. Alaskans have consistently protested against this kind of offshore oil and gas development in the past. When the last 5 year plan was announced, more than 99 percent of the approximately 93,000 people who commented opposed the sale. There has been substantial opposition to oil and gas drilling based on environmental risks and the importance of healthy coastal waters to Alaska's economy and communities.

“Expanded drilling in Cook Inlet isn’t an abstract risk; it’s a direct threat to our communities,” said Cook Inletkeeper’s Co-Executive Director, Bridget Maryott. “More oil and gas means a higher risk of a catastrophic spill. Alaskans who lived through the Exxon Valdez know exactly how devastating that can be. With the Inlet’s icy waters, powerful tides, and relentless weather, cleanup would be impossible. At a time when families are already struggling with high costs of living, it’s unacceptable to hand over our livelihoods to outside oil companies to gamble with the waters that feed our households, sustain our local fisheries, and drive our tourism economy. This five-year plan ignores the realities on the ground and the people who will bear the consequences.”

The OCS 5-year plan also follows the federal government’s new approach of using bureaucratic and congressional loopholes to reduce public input, and circumvent the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The new proposed 5 year plan was announced the week of Thanksgiving with a 60 day comment period spanning the holidays and closing January 23, 2026. In addition, BOEM recently pushed through Lease Sale 258 without significant changes or any opportunities for public comment; a departure from 50 years of broad public engagement typically associated with these procedures. Congress also directed six additional lease sales to take place in Cook Inlet in the Big Beautiful Bill, on which the government is refusing to conduct the typical NEPA review.

“We are calling for people to raise their voices and make a public comment about this plan,” said Maryott. “This is the only chance we’ll have to comment on any of the upcoming lease sales set for the next seven years.”

Inletkeeper is encouraging any US citizen to submit comments for the January 23rd open comment period. More information on the issue, how to submit comments, and ways to get further involved are available at www.inletkeeper.org/act

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