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Marin County Passes Local Ordinance Protecting its Coast from Dirty Offshore Oil

Trump Plan to Expand Offshore Leasing Meets Strong Resistance in Marin County

San Rafael, California (August 25, 2020) - The Marin County Board of Supervisors has adopted an ordinance banning the development of onshore infrastructure for offshore oil and gas without a vote from Marin residents. This ordinance builds on Marin County's past work to oppose fracking and the county's prior 2018 resolution to support *Protection of our Ocean and Coast from Offshore Drilling and Fracking*. So far 90 resolutions in opposition to offshore drilling have been adopted along the West Coast since April 2017, when President Trump announced plans to drastically expand offshore drilling.

Just last week, the Trump administration announced plans to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas development signaling the administration's intention to prioritize unsustainable energy expansion. Last year, the federal administration released its proposed offshore leasing plan to dramatically expand offshore oil drilling in all oceans along U.S. coasts, including off California for the first time in over 30 years. The proposed plan directly threatens the Pacific's vibrant marine ecosystems and clean-coast economy with catastrophic oil spills, toxic pollution, and climate chaos. It is part of a dangerous larger plan, in which the federal administration has plans to expand oil and gas throughout the nation with no regard for sensitive ecosystems.

Marin County is working to stop these dangerous actions and protect our local coasts.

“Marin County’s shoreline borders the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, nine Marine Protected Areas, and three special closures. The waters off Marin County are globally significant and provide a productive marine ecosystem, abundant wildlife, and valuable fisheries. The priceless biodiversity and thriving marine ecosystems of northern California waters are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of an oil spill or fracking.” said Morgan Patton, Executive Director for the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin (EAC), a Marin based non-profit focusing on the protection of our coastal communities

Trump’s proposal would place thousands of miles of America’s coast at risk from oil and gas operations, including catastrophic oil spills like the Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico and the 1969 Santa Barbara spill which spewed over 3 million gallons of oil into the ocean, killing countless seabirds, sea mammals and other marine life. A decade after Deepwater Horizon tragedy, the scars are still felt. More recently, during the spill on Refugio State Beach in 2015, 140,000 gallons of oil from offshore drilling spilled and spread over 150 miles of the California coast.

The adoption of this ordinance is crucial at a time when the federal administration is relentless in its efforts to pursue unsustainable oil and gas development. This ordinance puts the choice to the Marin County residents, requiring them to vote before any onshore oil and gas processing plants and other facilities associated with offshore oil drilling are allowed within county lines. While Marin County is fortunate to have state marine protected areas, state special closures, and two National Marine Sanctuaries off of its coast, these federal Sanctuaries still remain subject to an ambiguous “review” by the federal administration.

Today’s action allows for more seamless protection by connecting with the protections of other similar county ordinances to the north and south. This ordinance will allow Marin County residents to choose whether they want any onshore facilities supporting oil and gas in the future in Marin, allowing for necessary additional local control.

This week’s ordinance is sponsored by Supervisors Dennis Rodoni and Kate Sears. The ordinance is supported by the Environmental Action Committee of West Marin and The Ocean Foundation, which have been supporting local communities in considering the adoption of a new series of California city and county resolutions and ordinances opposing offshore drilling and fracking, as part of the Protect the Pacific coalition.

“This ordinance is an important step to add critical protection for Marin County’s valuable coastal habitats and economy.” said Ashley Eagle-Gibbs, Conservation Director for EAC

“We stand in opposition to any prospects of drilling off our coast. Measures like this help to prevent continued reliance on harmful unsustainable energy development that exacerbates the climate crisis and wreaks havoc on sensitive habitats and ecosystems.” said Morgan Patton, Executive Director for EAC

“Marin today joins with a host of other coastal local governments in ensuring that their constituents will be the ultimate determining factor in whether or not industrial facilities to support offshore drilling can be sited along the central coast. This is an issue where local control can best protect local economic and environmental interests.”

— Richard Charter, Senior Fellow, The Ocean Foundation

The Marin County ordinance allows for:

- The County of Marin voters to retain “the final authority on whether to allow onshore support facilities for offshore oil and gas development following any legislative approvals granted by the Board of Supervisors or other County entity.”
- “The people of the County of Marin to make future decisions about whether the development of an onshore support facility is in the best interest of the public health, safety, environment, and general welfare of the County.”

The ordinance acknowledges Marin County’s unique vulnerabilities including:

- Lack of oil containment technology in the event of a spill,
- A history and potential for seismic activity,
- High erosion rates, and
- The prevalence of seasonal and king tide flooding, as well as severe winter storms, which will be exacerbated by climate change and sea level rise.

Similar ordinances already exist in the counties of Santa Cruz, Sonoma, San Mateo, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, San Diego, Mendocino, and Humboldt.

Ashley Eagle-Gibbs, EAC’s Conservation Director reiterated the importance of Marin’s coastal habitat and significant recreation and tourism use:

“Marin’s waters provide habitat for at least 25 endangered or threatened species, 36 marine mammal species...over a quarter-million breeding seabirds, and one of the biggest, most significant white shark populations on the planet. Additionally, the beaches and shorelines of Marin are visited by people locally and internationally. In our survey samples from 2014-2020, EAC’s Marin Marine Protected Area (MPA) Watch program has recorded more than 19,000 recreational activities in and near MPAs in Marin County.”

There are more than 27 offshore drilling platforms and hundreds of miles of underwater oil and gas pipelines off California’s coast. Operators want permits to frack offshore wells, using chemicals toxic to wildlife. Not in Marin!

Learn more about EAC’s work to [Protect the Pacific](#).

[Environmental Action Committee of West Marin \(EAC\)](#): Established in 1971, EAC’s [mission](#) is to protect and sustain the unique lands, waters, and biodiversity of West Marin.

The Ocean Foundation: As the only community foundation for the ocean, The Ocean Foundation's mission is to support, strengthen, and promote those organizations dedicated to reversing the trend of destruction of ocean environments around the world. The Ocean Foundation focuses professional expertise on emerging threats in order to generate cutting edge solutions and better strategies for implementation.

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