Jan. 23, 2026

RE: Docket ID BOEM-2025-0483
To: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Dear BOEM,

We, the undersigned, write collectively from across Alaska to express our alarm and strong opposition to the proposal by the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management (BOEM) to open nearly all federal waters off Alaska's coasts — nearly 1 billion acres — to fossil fuel extraction under the 11th national offshore drilling plan. As written, the plan would allow leasing in all but one Alaska planning area. We urge BOEM to keep all Alaska federal waters off limits to leasing because leasing anywhere is too harmful and risky.

In Alaska, our cultures, economy, health, and food security depend upon a healthy marine environment. Critically, allowing this extreme surge in offshore drilling could destroy subsistence opportunities. Subsistence is vital and irreplaceable to Alaskans, particularly Alaska Native communities. Since it was proposed decades ago, many Alaska Native Tribes and organizations have expressed strong opposition to offshore drilling. We urge BOEM to listen to those voices and the many others that have called on BOEM to leave their waters alone. The value of subsistence resources to the people here cannot be monetized.

BOEM's plan would jeopardize some of our most sensitive and productive marine environments and directly harm tourism and fishing, the second- and third-largest economic sectors in Alaska. Alaska attracts more than 3 million visitors annually, many of whom arrive seeking marine and coastal experiences. Our fisheries are among the most productive and valuable in the world, producing more than half the fish caught in U.S. waters. Meanwhile, reports of a projected state budget deficit of more than $1.8 billion, despite expected oil increases, show that continued reliance on this industry as an economic driver is unsustainable.

Increased drilling opens the door to more oil spills, which can devastate entire marine ecosystems and adjacent shorelines. Many of us remember the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which released more than 10 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound in 1989. To this day, no proven response technologies would recover more than a small fraction of the oil from a large offshore spill in Alaska.

Drilling in Alaska would be particularly dangerous due to sea ice, intense storms, and the remoteness of most locations – rendering oil spill cleanup virtually impossible. And spills are very likely to happen. For example, Interior's own analysis has

previously concluded that if just one major lease in the Arctic's Chukchi Sea were developed, there would be a 75 percent chance of an oil spill of greater than 1,000 barrels in this sensitive region.

Offshore drilling anywhere in Alaska will also serve to accelerate the climate crisis, disproportionately impacting the Arctic – which is warming nearly four times faster than the worldwide average. Wildfires, sea-ice melt, more frequent and intense storms, coastal erosion, permafrost thaw, and ecological imbalance leading to blight, insect infestations, and disease, all linked to climate change, will impact Alaska and its residents for decades to come.

These impacts are already harming communities, especially Alaska Native communities, across the state. For example, coastal erosion has forced at least one village to relocate, which took decades and cost over $150 million. Approximately 140 other villages face billions of dollars in combined costs to protect their communities from climate change-related risks over the next half century.

Leasing and drilling would also have devastating effects on marine life, including beluga whales, gray whales, polar bears, and seals. In Cook Inlet, a distinct population of critically endangered beluga whales declined nearly 80 percent between 1979 and 2018; now only an estimated 331 whales are left. They face impossible odds with the proposed increase in offshore drilling in Cook Inlet, where more drilling is being touted as a false solution to the local natural gas shortage. BOEM's own projection in fact shows little to no economically recoverable natural gas in Cook Inlet's federal waters.

In addition to the environmental harm this program would cause, it would also waste considerable taxpayer resources. These programs are expensive to execute, and few companies are interested. In addition, Alaska's Regional Director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) recently warned that the department's "workforce in Alaska is currently below sustainable levels necessary to oversee current lease operations." If BSEE cannot keep up with current operations, it is unreasonable to pursue this extreme increase in leasing.

We call on BOEM to abandon plans to offer any new oil-and-gas lease sales in federal waters off Alaska. It is time to prioritize the needs of coastal communities who rely on the waters surrounding Alaska for livelihoods and traditions. BOEM should instead look for opportunities to advance reliable, renewable energy development.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic (SILA)
Native Movement
Cook Inletkeeper
Kachemak Bay Conservation Society
Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association
Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Alaska Community Action on Toxics
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council
Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges
The Alaska Center
Alaska Wilderness League
Protect Our Winters
Friends of the Earth, US
Pacific Environment
Earthjustice
Defenders of Wildlife
Oceana
Surfrider Foundation
Greenpeace, USA
Arctic Connections
Center for Biological Diversity
Defenders of Wildlife
Sierra Club, Alaska Chapter
The Wilderness Society
Civilized Humanity

Individuals:
Fran Ulmer, Member, National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill & Offshore Drilling
Marilyn Heiman, Former Director, U.S. Arctic Program, Pew Charitable Trust
Gus Schumacher, Olympic skier, Protect Our Winters Team athlete
Margaret Williams, Anchorage resident, Arctic/conservation expert
Satchel Pondolfino, Clean Water Lead, Cook Inletkeeper
Michael Knutson